



## The LiberaNos Project

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The scourge of human trafficking is evolving rapidly, showing a remarkable ability to adapt to the new forms of globalisation. We are confronted with an entrepreneurial dynamism, which takes full advantage of the explosion of air transport and of social networks; which reorganizes quickly its connections, its structures and its safe havens; and which catches the almost limitless opportunities offered by protracted conflicts, civil wars, failed states, environmental crises and wild migrations.

### 1. How to stop the emergence of modern slavery?

The belated but finally methodical steps taken throughout the last century to fight traditional and then modern slavery have brought a rather coherent approach, based on international conventions, laws, agreements and initiatives, which combines the respective roles of international organisations, states, religions and NGOs.

But this consistent fabric finds itself undermined, bypassed and outsmarted by agile and efficient criminal actors: they are the discreet masters of a globalized shadow capitalism based on maximal profit, violence and destruction of human dignity, which has clearly taken the advantage of the offensive.

This confrontation has therefore entered a new, critical phase: the established legal apparatus remains basically indispensable, as well as the programs and procedures; there is ample room for consolidation, improvement or reform; but our exchanges during this session show that these necessary endeavours will remain insufficient in a changing environment and that new means of action must be mobilized.

### 2. The creation of a global, multi-purpose Internet site, based on the engagement of actors on the ground who confront modern slavery, is one of them.

Modern slavery is a very complex phenomenon, and it would be foolish to think that a single initiative could reverse the situation. But fifteen years after the Palermo Protocol, the fact that all committed actors share more or less the feeling that the glass is “half full and half empty” calls for other forms of international mobilisation.

Pope Francis has opened the way, forcefully, and has launched a large process through this Academy. Other initiatives must support and prolong his worldwide call.

Such is the purpose of the LiberaNos Internet site, which can be defined as an attempt to modify the “rules of the game” through a bottom up initiative, with three basic orientations:

- Go global with the Internet, the new technologies and social networks, in order to expose, stigmatise and confront publicly a global crime
- Promote the role of field actors and, through them, the message of victims and survivors
- Stay connected in daily action, and thereby get out of frustrating isolation in local “hide and seek” situations, in order to share and coordinate knowledge, research, tools, experience, best practices and strategies.

### 4. This will not be an easy exercise, for many reasons:

- It goes against a general abstentionism in most societies, where various combinations of silence, indifference, fatalism, tolerance and complicity lead to the banalisation of violence
- The criminal networks have demonstrated their ability to adjust or transform themselves: as solid and experienced holdings, multinationals or conglomerates of their kind, they will react, mobilize and retaliate
- One must also take into account another sort of challenger, i.e. the promoters of the “normalisation” of prostitution, in the name of the freedom of the individual; they are well established in the media, and have demonstrated their ability for lobbying within institutions, national and international alike. Whatever their “ideological” statement, they are discreetly supported by powerful economic interests.

### 5. In front of these difficulties, where can we find good precedents of bottom up mobilisation leading to a radical change of mentalities, behaviours and rules?

The impressive precedents of Gandhi and Martin Luther King have been rightfully mentioned, but they keep a “national” character, even if they have had wider consequences. The case of Henri Dunant’s relentless action, from 1859 on, leading to the creation of the Red Cross in 1865, is also inspiring, and very pertinent. But we can draw useful lessons from a very recent initiative: the ban on anti-personnel landmines.

In view of repeated failure of the attempts to launch formal negotiations on the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines within the appropriate organisation, i.e. the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, due to the strong resistance of several member states, six international NGOs, following a call from the Red Cross, launched, with the full support of Canada, an International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL). This initiative, largely relayed by the media, led to an *ad hoc* negotiation, the "Ottawa Process", joined by a very large number of states and concluded successfully in 1997 by the adoption of the Ottawa Convention.

Interestingly, this disarmament convention includes a substantial humanitarian component, which foresees international assistance to the victims, including the social and economic reintegration of the survivors.

This example is indeed not an invitation to bypass the international organisations. On the contrary, it shows how a good combination of complementary forces between different types of actors can overcome an obstacle which, at first, seems to be overwhelming.

## II. The LiberaNos website project.

This initiative is a direct response to the request expressed by the participants to the Conference organized by this Academy on November 3rd, 2013, following the impulsion given by Pope Francis. The very rich exchanges between the field actors, coming from all parts of the world, had clearly exposed their common need of an appropriate tool of information and coordination, as stated in the points 27, 34 and 42 of the Declaration adopted on this occasion.

1. The LiberaNos website aims to take full advantage of the new opportunities offered by the expansion of the Internet, i.e. the ability to:

- Educate a wide audience and share knowledge and news about the different forms of modern slavery;
- Mobilise, influence and persuade opinion makers, stakeholders and the general public;
- Stimulate and federate networks established by various communities (religious orders, social actors, NGOs, victims, experts), and improve communications and cooperation between field actors, who are most of the time confined by necessity to their specific area;
- Provide these actors with services and tools in order to help them assume their mission, find out new ways to fight these crimes and develop coordinated strategies.

2. The elaboration of this project has been fully supported during last year by the Scelles Foundation, based in Paris, an independent, non-profit organization, which has fought since 1995 against human trafficking and sexual exploitation worldwide through analysis, advocacy and awareness initiatives. The Foundation has developed an International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation with more than 3000 studies and has presented for the third consecutive year a Global Report on the state of sexual exploitation. The last one insists precisely on the growing adaptability of the criminal networks. The Scelles Foundation has established key European and international partnerships through the EU Civil Society Platform Against Human Trafficking (more than 200 associations) and CAP International, a coalition to abolish prostitution between 14 leading associations from all continents.

The project has also integrated the experience of the trilingual (French, English, Arabic) website of the Pharos Observatory of cultural and religious pluralism, created in 2012. Pharos works presently in Central Africa and is about to launch a European program covering six countries (Cuba, Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan, Indonesia and North Korea).

The LiberaNos website will be first launched in English and French, and more languages will be added later. Information will be available from all media, with a refined design and a simple, ergonomic and intuitive navigation.

The legal base of the site is the LiberaNos Association, registered in Paris last year. The President and the Chancellor of this Academy are members of the Council, as well as leaders of the Scelles Foundation and prominent lawyers and academics.

3. The website itself is made up of two spaces, Internet for the public and intranet for registered actors.

The Internet space has six sections (each one being divided in four subsections):

- 'MODERN SLAVERY' aims to significantly increase public awareness and understanding of modern slavery and human trafficking. It presents the reality of the multi-faceted human slavery through key facts, videos, testimonials, resources, last news and publications.

- 'LIBERANOS' presents all the services and tools which the LiberaNos website delivers as a communication agency and describes the supporting association, its missions, its people and partners.
- 'NETWORK' intends to facilitate global communications, strengthen exchanges among the wide variety of stakeholders involved in the fight against human slavery, and federate networks by regions and communities. It offers a database of field actors which one can find key words or on a map, and even export in files. It also provides major information about communities acting against modern slavery (religious organisations, academic institutions, NGOs, survivors, movements in business, etc.).
- 'LAB' generates new understanding and innovative strategies against modern slavery. It is the think tank where experts, stakeholders and the public will discuss on modern slavery in different ways, propose and test pioneering approaches. The LiberaNos Laboratory will edit a large number of publications, proposals, surveys, videos, and organize debates, conferences, round-tables, in order to raise public interest, foster new mentalities and behaviours, and persuade opinion makers.
- 'NEWS CENTER' delivers updated news about modern slavery to the public and the media. As a press agency, LiberaNos not only selects and delivers world news through media reviews, special topics, focuses, news from the field, but it also creates its own information via its own media (TV, newsletters, photos, blog) and provide a wide range of resources: legal frameworks, country files, surveys, documents, statements and speeches. A dedicated "on line pressroom" will help to build solid relationships and partnerships with the media.
- 'GET INVOLVED' intends to motivate and involve the greatest number of institutional and individual stakeholders possible in our combat, and foster a change in mentalities and cultures. It proposes several degrees of involvement in the fight against modern slavery and in international action. It shows how each of us can become a part of the solution, as a follower, a donator, an activist, and how the different kinds of actions are engaged, with their results.

The intranet space is a private one, dedicated to registered stakeholders. It has been designed as a collaborative platform for exchange and dialogue, in an innovative online environment, where field actors can work globally in a more coordinated and effective manner. Actors against modern slavery can find, test and share useful tools (communication materials, fundraising tools, guides, advocacy tips) and customized services (consultancy, campaign management, public relations) in order to help them in their mission, strengthen their actions and mobilize more widely.

This platform includes online meetings (webinars) and events, online discussions on a dedicated forum, e-learning and training, sharing of resources, ideas, experiences and best practices, case studies, in order to work better together and stimulate appropriate forms of engagement and strategies designed to tackle modern slavery.

The managing team will start with two persons. Four months will be necessary to effectively launch the site, and our best hope is to start before the end of this year. The very strict budget for the first year of operation is 150,000 euros. It may then be developed in several phases, in order to rapidly meet the priority needs of the field actors.

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To sum up, the LiberaNos website intends to fulfil progressively three basic functions which could accelerate the abolition of modern slavery: introduce the subject with full capacity into the global sphere of the media; create a worldwide community of militants able to change the hearts and minds with the support of appropriate tools; establish a common structure of coordination and distribution of work in front of the complexity of modern slavery.

In developing this project, we have been very conscious that many pioneers have opened the way. Their experience has convinced us that there is now a great opportunity to strengthen the role of frontline defenders of modern slaves. We can and we must now deploy "the force of the weak" at a global level. Pope Paul VI said that today, people don't anymore listen to masters, but do listen to witnesses. Let's build now a coalition of witnesses with the best modern means available against modern slavery, in order to confront this scourge and to restore the dignity of the victims.