

## International Conference

### Drugs and Addictions: an Obstacle to Integral Human Development

*29-30 November – 1 December 2018*

*New Synod Hall – Vatican City*

#### CONCEPT NOTE

The Phenomenon of Drugs constitutes a worrisome problem in the world today and requires serious study and action. Narcotics continue to “rage in impressive forms and dimensions”.<sup>1</sup> It is a phenomenon that is fuelled – not without concessions and compromises on the part of institutions – by “a shameful market that crosses national and continental borders”,<sup>2</sup> intertwined with organized crime groups and drug trafficking. Pope Francis has on several occasions emphasized that the scourge of drug-trafficking, which favours violence and sows the seeds of suffering and death, requires of society an act of courage.

In an effort to contribute to the understanding of and the search for appropriate responses to the deadly phenomenon, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development is organizing an International Conference around the theme “Drugs and Addictions: an Obstacle to Integral Human Development.” The Conference, which will be held in the Vatican on November 29, 30 and 1 December 2018, is a response to the Holy Father’s call for resolve in the fight against narcotics and an expression of the commitment of the Church to addressing the drug problem.

Today we know “more about the fatal effects of drugs on the psychic balance, on the family life, on the personal and social life of adults and youth. They cause various handicaps for many people who seek ‘a supplement to life’ offered by the psycho-stimulants. They lead in fact, to results that are contrary to what was expected, because the consumption of the substance can give rise to negative behaviour, which interferes with the relationships, and which seriously reduces the freedom of a person, sometimes to the extent of cancelling it completely.”<sup>3</sup>

According to the World Drug Report 2017, “an estimated quarter of a billion people, or around 5 per cent of the global adult population, used drugs at least once in 2015. Even more worrisome is the fact that about 29.5 million of those drug users, or 0.6 per cent of the global adult population, suffer from drug use disorders. This means that their drug use is harmful to the point that they may experience drug dependence and require treatment.”<sup>4</sup> Nowadays we are faced with a scenario of profoundly changed dependencies, compared to the recent past.<sup>5</sup> Drugs have become

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Address to participants in the 31st Drug Enforcement Conference*, 20 June 2014.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>3</sup> Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, *Church: drugs and drug addiction*, n.5, p.8.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2017*, Vol.1, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Department for Anti-Drug policies, *Annual Report to Parliament on the use of illicit substances and drug dependency in Italy for the year 2016*.

a consumer product, proposed as being compatible with everyday life, with leisure activity and even with the pursuit of well-being.

Cocaine consumption is associated with a greater spread of heroin, which “still represents the highest percentage (80%) of new requests for opioid-related treatment in Europe”.<sup>6</sup> In addition, new intoxicating, psychoactive substances (NPS), available at low cost and anonymously on the market via the internet, also find their way into places of detention.

The most commonly consumed recreational drug, however, is cannabis. International debate tends to overlook the ethical judgment of this substance (by definition negative as with any other drug),<sup>7</sup> and focuses instead on possible therapeutic uses.

Internet addiction, pornography and sex addiction, as well as pathological gambling or ludopathy have for some time been a rampant scourge that further diversify addictions. The legalization of gambling, even when it is supported by the intention of unmasking its criminal management, exponentially increases the number of pathological players; moreover, taxation by the state is to be considered incompatible from an ethical standpoint and contradictory in terms of prevention. The definition of models of intervention and adequate monitoring systems, associated with the allocation of funds, is highly desirable to tackle the phenomenon.

As the landscape of addictions diversifies, indifference and at times indirect complicity in this phenomenon contributes to diverting the attention of public opinion and governments, often focused on other emergencies. But faced with surprising events, it is often the emergency solution that prevails over a serious culture of prevention capable of being equipped with goals, tools and resources to ensure consistency and durability in addressing the problems. The present-day picture of addictions shows, in many cases, gaps in planning, policies and prospects.

The Conference will bring together experts from around the world, interested international organisations, specialists from the local Churches and those in charge of rehabilitation centres to explore the complex areas of drug use and supply, as well as other addictions, learning from the different experiences or best practices, in prevention, suppression, treatment and rehabilitation.

The contribution of the Dicastery aims to complement the efforts of workers in a variety of fields: politicians, social and health workers, parents, educators, judges and directors of sectors of action. The Conference will, among other things, focus on efforts and examples of prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration that lead people to discover their proper dignity both as human beings and as members of the one family of the children of God,<sup>8</sup> which is essential for the promotion of an authentic or integral development. As Paul VI rightly put it, a well rounded development; one that “fosters the development of each man and of the whole man.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, *European Report on Drugs, 2017*.

<sup>7</sup> The “No to any type of drug” has been reiterated several times by Pope Francis. Cf, for example, the General Audience of 7 May 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, *New Charter for Health Care Workers*, nn. 123-124.

<sup>9</sup> Paul VI, Encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio*, n.14.