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Prefect of the Dicastery of
Evangelization and Grand Master of
the Supreme Order of Christ
Vatican City State 00120

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AN OPEN LETTER TO POPE FRANCIS AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WORLDWIDE!

22 August 2022

Your Holiness and Eminences,

The trafficking (trading) in and enslavement of human beings, and the struggle against it, is in the 2000-year-old DNA of the Catholic Church worldwide, despite the litany of apologetics that deny or minimize its role. This Open Letter however is not another request for an apology for the crimes committed during the trafficking in, enslavement and colonization of more than 60 million African People from 1317 to 1888; or the crimes committed against 1.5 billion African People today.

Pan-African Roots does not demand reparations or compensation of any kind. We do not compete with those who make these demands. We do not speak for African People, we speak truth to them, to the powerless and the powerful of the world.

This Open Letter is addressed to Pope Francis and the Catholic Church Worldwide. I had the honor to be part of the Delegation of the All-African People's Revolutionary Party^(GC) which visited Colombia in mid-August 2022, to celebrate the Inauguration of the new President and Vice President. Draft copies of this Letter were delivered to the Iglesia de San Pedro Claver¹ and other forces.

Pan-African Roots requests that You confirm that "God Makes No Slaves in the Womb;"² and that the trafficking in and enslavement of all human beings, not just African People, was illegal, was a Crime against Humanity, and against God. We request that You galvanize and unleash the full extent and power of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church to translate, transcribe, digitize, disclose, and make accessible its' slavery era records. Many of these records have been disclosed and digitized, more remain to be disclosed and digitized.

We further request that You enable and empower a new generation of 21st century digital ninjas, especially African Youth in every corner of Africa and the African Diaspora, to participate fully in this preservation, archival and scholarly work and

¹ Saint Pedro Claver was the "slave of a slave" of an estimated 300,000 Africans whom he baptized as they were trafficked through the Cartagena, and 200,000 Africans from whom he heard confessions. See <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Peter-Claver>

² In 1848, the American Missionary Association commissioned Rev. John Gregg Fee, founder of Berea College, to publish "An anti-slavery manual." He argued that "God Makes No Slaves In the Womb!" See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Gregg_Fee

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See attached Incomplete List of Bulls
of Exploration and Discovery,
Settlement and Colonization,
Trafficking and Enslavement, Erection
and Elevation, and Forced Conversion

study. Our goal is simple: raise the level of consciousness and create new generations of anti-slavery and anti-trafficking archivists, researchers, and scholars; activists and organizers; priests and lay people. Bottom-line, give every Youth in the world a library card that gives them access to this and related treasure troves of slavery-era and colonial-era information, activities and events.

Perhaps these cards can be dedicated to the Victims---historical and current---of human trafficking and enslavement in Africa, the African Diaspora, and the World. These cards will serve as digital passports, and quickly become the most valuable possession in this generation of youth's lives.

This is more than an Open Letter. It is part of a worldwide slavery-era and colonial-era records disclosure movement and network, campaign and crusade. Similar Open Letters will be addressed to the Responsibles of Traditional African, Judaic, Muslim, Protestant, and other religious, spiritual and "irreligious" traditions, in Europe, Africa, and the African Diaspora. These Letters will also be addressed to the Heads of State and Government of Spain (including Argentina, Mexico and Uruguay), Portugal (including Brazil), Britain and the United States, France, the Netherlands, Denmark and the Baltic Countries (including Germany, Austria, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Lithuania and Poland), and their Empires.

Pan-African Roots will publish information which proves beyond any doubt that the trafficking in and enslavement of African People during the so-called "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade" was illegal. It will be published online, and compiled in a book, which will be distributed free. We demand that these countries, islands, territories, and dependencies, and other stake-holders proclaim and legislate the truth.

The Movement to Revoke the Bulls of Discovery

Dr. Martin Luther King said, "an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Malcolm X suggested, that if we have a problem, and do not know how to solve that problem, we should find a people who have a problem similar to ours. Find out how they solved their problem, and we will know how to solve ours.

As You are aware, since at least 1984, Indigenous Peoples³ of the Western Hemisphere have petitioned Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and You to repudiate, rescind and revoke the Papal Bulls Dum Diversas (1452), Romanus Pontifex (1455) and Inter Coetera (1493). Several Catholic and Protestant Organizations have endorsed this demand,⁴ and the Movement to rebuke these Bulls is growing stronger, day-by-day.

³ Haudensaune e Confederacy (Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy), Assembly of First Nations (Canada), Canadian Aboriginal Council, Inuit Nation, Long March to Rome, Indian Law Institute, Metis Nation, Thirteen Religious Mothers, Yakama Nation, Mapuche Nation, Aboriginals of Australia, and Other Indigenous Groups.

⁴ 8th Day Center, Congregation of Sisters of St Agnes, Canadian conference of Catholic Bishops, Dominican Sisters Conference, Episcopal House Of Bishops, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Institute of the Blessed Virgin of Fond de Loc , Institute of the Blessed Virgin of Rome, Leadership Council of Women Religious, Passionist International, Pax Christi International, Romero Institute, Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Sisters of Loretto / Community , Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of St Francis Of Rochester, Sisters of St Joseph of Buffalo, Sisters of St Joseph of Concordia, Sisters of St Joseph of Philadelphia, The Christian Reformed Church (USA), The Episcopal Church, The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), The Unitarian Universalist Assembly, The United Church of Christ, The United Methodist Church, The World Council of Churches, UPStander Project, and Others

Pan-African Roots joins them in requesting that You and the Catholic Church repudiate and revoke these Bulls of Discovery and other related Church Documents. It is the right thing to do. Request #2: Please confirm the notes listed below from United Nations and Vatican meetings regarding this demand.

1. On 27 April 2010, Archbishop Tomasi, told the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues that the Bull “Inter Coetera, as a source of International Law, the division of the lands between Castile-Aragon (Spain) and Portugal was first abrogated by the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, and that Circumstances have changed so much that; to attribute any juridical value to such a document seems completely out of place.”⁵

“It was abrogated by other Bulls,” according to the Archbishop, “for example Sublimis Deus in 1537 which states, “Indians and all other people who may later be discovered by Christians, are by no means to be deprived of their liberty or the possession of their property, even though they may be outside the faith of Jesus Christ; and that they may and should, freely and legitimately, enjoy their liberty and the possession of their property; nor should they be in any way enslaved; should the contrary happen, it shall be null and have no effect.”⁶

“This position was expanded upon and reinforced,” the Archbishop continued, “in Immensa Pastorum of Pope Benedict XIV of 20 December 1741 and a number of other Papal Encyclicals, statements and decrees.” “The Holy See confirms,” he concluded, “that Inter Coetera has already been abrogated and considers it without any legal or doctrinal value.”⁷

2. “On November 25, 2015,” according to Steven Newcomb, of Indian Country Today, “the Holy See appeared before the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Responding to an intervention on the doctrine of discovery by the Apache-Ndee-Nee Working Group, CERD member Carlos Manuel Vazquez asked the Holy See to clarify its position on the Papal document Inter Coetera of 1493 and the doctrine of discovery. Mr. Vazquez requested that a repeal of the Papal Bull “be discussed at the high-level meeting scheduled to take place in Rome between the Pope and representatives of Indigenous Peoples”⁸

“Archbishop Tomasi responded,” according to Newcomb, “for the Holy See. The Archbishop said that the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas between Spain and Portugal “effectively” made the Papal Bull “inoperative.” “Changing the historical consequences of the ideology reflected in those instruments would thus require changing the Treaty rather than the Papal Bull,” remarked Tomasi.”⁹

⁵ MVENNER. Vatican comments on Doctrine of Discovery: Statement by Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the UN’s Economic and Social Council, 9th Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues On Agenda Item 7: Discussion on the reports “Impact on Indigenous Peoples of the International legal construct known as the Doctrine of Discovery, which has served as the Foundation of the Violation of their Human Rights” and “Indigenous Peoples and Boarding schools: A Comparative Study.” (16 July 2018). Posted at <https://catholicnetwork.us/2018/06/16/vatican-comments-on-doctrine-of-discovery/>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Newcomb, Steven. “The Holy See’s Whopper of a Falsehood at the UN.” Updated on September 12, 2018. Original posted on Feb 16, 2016. Posted at <https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/the-holy-sees-whopper-of-a-falsehood-at-the-un>

⁹ Ibid.

Request #3: Please assure us that Cardinal Tomasi' response was and is correct.

3. On 4 May 2016, the Long March to Rome Delegation was afforded a Special Audience with You and a two-hour session of talks with the Pontifical Council for Justice & Peace. Archbishop Tomasi pointed out during this meeting, that "The Papal Bulls Dum Diversas (1452), Romanus Pontifex (1455) and Inter Coetera (1493) do not influence the position of the Holy See and of the Church since long time. The statement Sublimis Deus (1537), condemning racist theses, nullified any previous decrees that would deny the right of Indigenous Peoples in America of their freedom and their property. Moreover, the position of the Holy See is based on the new Code of Canon Law and on the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Both the Code and the Compendium are explicitly in favor of the rights of Indigenous People."¹⁰

"Further," the Archbishop clarified, "as they do not deal with theological themes, from a Church perspective, such Papal Bulls are rightly seen as political declarations, and therefore subject to retraction and revision, since they do not enjoy any element of infallibility."¹¹

4. On 7 May 2018, Indigenous Representatives had a four and a half hour meeting at the Holy See with members of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, the current name of the Pontifical Council for Justice & Peace. The Indigenous Delegation discussed seven points, including its request for the repudiation, recension and revocation of these Bulls.¹² Request #4: Please inform us of the outcome of that discussion and the status of that request.

5. On 28 July 2022, two First Nations Women displayed a banner during Pope Francis' Mass at the National Shrine of Saint Anne de Beaupré National Shrine in Quebec City, demanding that the Pope rescind the Papal Bulls of Discovery.

"The Vatican has clarified that the Papal Bulls associated with the Doctrine of Discovery have no legal or moral authority in the church," Neil MacCarthy, in charge of communications for the Papal visit, told the AP in an email."

"In an essay in the current issue of the Vatican-vetted Jesuit journal LaCiviltà Cattolica, the Rev. Federico Lombardi ... the retired Vatican spokesman, cited "Sublimis Deus" that asserted that Indigenous Peoples "are by no means to be deprived of their liberty or the possession of their property, even though they be outside the faith of Jesus Christ; and that they may and should freely and legitimately enjoy their liberty and the possession of their property; nor should they be in any way enslaved."¹³

Pan-African Roots offers unqualified and uncompromising support to the Indigenous Peoples and their Allies with respect to this demand. Request # 5:

¹⁰ Tomasi, Archbishop Salvano Maria. The Vatican responds to the Long March to Rome. (1 August 2016). Posted at <http://longmarchtorome.com/march/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/TOMASI-DMK-LETTER.pdf>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² McGivern, Mary Ann. (2018). Indian Nations ask Pope Francis to rescind Doctrine of Discovery. National Catholic Reporter. (1 December 2018). Posted at <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/ncr-today/indian-nations-ask-pope-francis-rescind-doctrine-discovery>

¹³ Winfield, Nicole; Giles, Rob. (July 28, 2022). "Rescind the Doctrine' protest greets pope in Canada. The Associated Press. <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/rescind-the-doctrine-protest-greets-pope-in-canada/>

Please confirm that “The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops is working with Vatican officials in Rome on the wording for a new statement rejecting an entire tradition of legal reasoning,” according to Jonathan Lesarge, the CCCB spokesman.

“Galvanized by the calls of our Indigenous partners and by the Holy Father’s remarks, Canada’s bishops have engaged and are actively working with the Vatican with the goal of issuing a new statement from the church,” he said in mid-September. “We do not have a confirmed timeline for when the Holy See intends to release this statement; however, the work is ongoing, and we hope to have an update in the coming weeks.”¹⁴

No one can deny the fact that the Bulls Dum Diversas (1452) and Romanus Pontifex (1455) refer to Africa and African People, not to the Americas or Indigenous People in the Western Hemisphere. No one can also deny the historical and continuing impact that Inter Coetera (1493) has had and continues to have on Africa and the African Diaspora, and on 1.5 billion African People today. A statement regarding the Bulls of trafficking and enslavement of African People is also required.

The 3rd World Conference against Racism

Pan-African Roots is concerned about and serves exploited and oppressed humanity, about human rights---historical and current---not money. We fight for Pan-Africanism, the total liberation and unification of Africa, but we do not make the private or state ownership of land our priority.

As you are aware, from 31 August to 3 September 2001, the 3rd United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) met at the International Conference Center in Durban, South Africa. More than 18,000 delegates from 70 countries participated in this historic event, including 16 Heads of States, 58 foreign ministers, 44 ministers, 7,000 non-governmental representatives, and 1,300 journalists.

This 3rd WCAR Conference was hosted by the Government of South Africa, with Ms. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, its Foreign Minister, serving as its representative and the Head of its Delegation. The Conference was chaired by Ms. Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. It was opened by Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations. We will struggle to send a copy of this and other emails to all 3rd WCAR participants and their successors.

An NGO Forum was held in the nearby Kingsmead Stadium from 28 August to 1 September 2001. More than 8,000 representatives of 3,000 NGOs from every corner of the world took part. We will send a copy of this Open Letter to as many of the listed people and entities as we can, to their successors, and to all forces who love justice and seek peace.

We had the privilege to attend this 3rd WCAR NGO Forum as an organizer for the All-African People's Revolutionary Party and as a co-director of Pan-African Roots, a 501c3 not-for-profit organization. I did not attend the governmental session.

Paragraph 13 of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which was

¹⁴ Swan, Michael. (20 September 2022). What is the Doctrine of Discovery, and will Vatican statement affect it? Catholic News Service. Posted at <https://www.catholicsun.org/2022/09/20/what-is-the-doctrine-of-discovery-and-will-vatican-statement-affect-it/>

approved at the governmental session of the 3rd WCAR,

“[A]cknowledge[d] that slavery and the slave trade, including the transatlantic slave trade, were appalling tragedies in the history of humanity not only because of their abhorrent barbarism but also in terms of their magnitude, organized nature and especially their negation of the essence of the victims, and further acknowledge[d] that slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity and should always have been so, especially the transatlantic slave trade and are among the major sources and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and that Africans and people of African descent, Asians and people of Asian descent and Indigenous peoples were victims of these acts and continue to be victims of their consequences.”

We disagreed 21 years ago and continue to disagree today with 5 words in this paragraph: “should have always been so.” We were and are not alone in our disagreement. These words were and continue to be discussed and debated in every corner of the World. Pan-African Roots intends to help raise the political temperature and the revolutionary quality of this discussion.

We have spent the past two decades since the 3rd World Conference researching the Bulls of exploration and discovery, settlement and colonization, trafficking and enslavement, and forced conversion. We are conscious of and thankful for the growing body of academic and church-based scholarship that is appearing out of the Nigerian Catholic Church. We cite two authors here: Dr. Pius Onyemechi Adiele¹⁵ and Fr. Angelo Chidi Unegbu.¹⁶ We are aware of the scholarship that precedes and undergirds theirs; and the scholarship that is appearing worldwide.

Your Holiness and Eminences,

We attach an incomplete list of Papal Bulls, Statements and Documents for and/or against trafficking and enslavement from 1307 to the present. We will publish information for each of them soon, that explains and justifies why they should also be reviewed, repudiated and revoked, renewed and/or reaffirmed. We will publish a list of similar Bulls dating from 32 BC to 1306 soon.

Perhaps the Magisterium, especially the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, the Vatican Library, the Vatican Apostolic Library, and other Church and allied structures will accelerate their efforts to develop a decentralized and digitized list of these Bulls, and a decentralized, global teaching tool. Surely, the hundreds of thousands of priests, archivists, scholars and students in the Catholic Church worldwide have already preserved and produced these documents and has the ability to accelerate their efforts to digitize them.

Request #6: Pan-African Roots requests that You confirm that the God Makes No slaves in the Womb, and that the trafficking in (trading) and enslavement of African People was a Crime against Humanity, a Crime against God; and publicly confirm

¹⁵ Adiele, Dr. Pius Onyemechi. (2017) *The Popes, the Catholic Church and the Transatlantic Enslavement of Black Africans 1418-1839*. Georg Olms Verlag. Hildesheim, Germany.

¹⁶ Unegbu, Fr. Angelo Chidi (22 June 2022). *The Erection of Propaganda Fide 400 Years Ago (22nd June 1622 – 22nd June 2022)*. The Nigeria Catholic Network. Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. Abuja.

the founding, controlling and unjust enriching role that the Catholic Church played in this crime.

Request #7: That the attached List of Bulls, and similar Papal Bulls, issued over the past 2,000 years, are also “rightly seen as political declarations, and therefore subject to retraction and revision, since they do not enjoy any element of infallibility;” that they “have no legal or moral authority in the Church” and have “already been abrogated;” and have been or will be repudiated and revoked, or renewed and revitalized where appropriate.

Request #8: On November 25, 2013, thirteen Catholic organizations requested that Pope Francis “issue a formal rescission of the 15th century bulls that provide the basis for the Doctrine of Discovery.” They also ask Pope Francis to create a new papal bull that promotes ethical norms in harmony with Gospel values.” Pan-African Roots supports these requests. We request that Pope Francis also rescind the Bulls on our List that call for and support the enslavement of African People; and that he create another papal bull that specifically addresses our concerns.

The Slavery Era Records Disclosure Movement

Permit us to make one last point. Osagefyo Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana teaches, “thought without action is empty, and action without thought is blind.” As You and the Church are aware, from 2002 to 2006, the Cities of Chicago, 8 other cities and 1 county passed Slavery Era Disclosure laws, requiring their Archdiocese and all other entities that do business with the cities, to disclose their slavery era records. In 2004, Pan-African Roots sent Freedom of Information Act requests to You and several Heads of States and Parties. We have received no reply.

In 2006, Pan-African Roots filed a multi-billion-dollar pro se slavery era records and whistleblower lawsuit against the Archdiocese of Chicago and 100 corporate, not-for-profit and governmental entities. We included other cities, counties and states in this whistleblower lawsuit. We lost on technicalities but are sure that it played a small part in the failure of Chicago’s bid to host the 2016 Olympics.

We proved, which was our goal, that the Archdiocese of Chicago and the other defendants had committed billions of dollars in fraud with their willful and calculated refusal to disclose their slavery era records as required by law. This fraud continues today. We bring it to your attention.

Perhaps You and the Holy See will look into this affair? Perhaps the masses of the People, in every corner of the world, will take to the streets and barricades of Chicago and the world, to demand the implementation of these and similar Slavery Era and Colonial Era Records Ordinances.

Sincerely,

Bob Brown, Director
Pan-African Roots