

Christian Commitment

“Created in the image of God, treated like slaves....”

“The human person ought never to be sold or bought as if he or she were a commodity. Whoever uses human persons in this way and exploits them, even if indirectly, becomes an accomplice of this injustice”.

Pope Francis

Introduction

Each year, thousands of people are deceived and sold into slavery as forced laborers, prostitutes or beggars, in other words become victims of human trafficking.

Human trafficking is a modern form of slavery. It involves controlling a person through force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to forced labour and sexual exploitation, debt bondage or other forms of servitude. Human trafficking strips victims of their freedom and violates the dignity as the human person created in the image of God. It is also first and foremost a crime.

Once a person is trafficked, escaping from that situation is always very difficult and often dangerous. Survivors of trafficking if they manage to flee almost invariably face a multitude of challenges. They are denied of access to legal rights, medical protection and counseling services. They may face criminalization and persecution, as well as stigmatization and discrimination and this regards not only of the trafficked person but also his or her family and environment. Moreover, any assistance for them is often conditional upon cooperation with authorities, regardless of the danger that this may expose the trafficked person to.

According to ILO estimates, there are at least 2.4 million trafficked persons at any given point in time. Yet there are only a few thousand convictions of traffickers every year¹. Most of the victims are not identified and consequently never receive justice for the damage inflicted upon them². Despite growing awareness and more effective law enforcement responses, trafficking remains a low-risk criminal enterprise with high returns. The ILO estimates that annual profits generated from trafficking in human beings are as high as US\$32 billion.

‘Root causes’ of trafficking in human beings in countries of origin include deprivation of basic human rights and access to basic needs, thus extreme poverty, especially affecting women, lack of *political, social and economical stability*, situations of *armed conflict and oppression, low status of women* in some cultures and *domestic violence*.

In countries of destination, trafficking occurs due to increasing *demand for cheap and exploitable laborers*, amongst others on farms, in factories, in fisheries, in construction zones, and in domestic work. A lack of respect for human dignity results in trafficking for forced marriage and removal of organs. The *“culture of indifference”* as Pope Francis calls it, leads to violence and abuse. It is not sufficiently challenged by authorities, public opinion, educators and the Church.

Other **‘drivers’** may include: a *lack of public awareness* of trafficking among the public at large and among the vulnerable target groups in particular; the *high profit* potential for those engaged in the criminal activity of human trafficking; a *lack of effective anti-trafficking legislation*, and even if such legislation exists, a *lack of proper and effective enforcement* of such legislation by the

¹ According to the Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) produced by US Government, in 2014 the estimated number of convictions was 5.776

(http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2014/?utm_source=NEW+RESOURCE:+Trafficking+in+Persons+R)

² In 2014 the number of identified victims was 44.758 (according to the same TIP Report)

responsible authorities. This is often a result of *corruption, obstacles to legal migration* channels to countries with stronger economies and/or regions with better prospects.

The efforts to combat trafficking in human beings should aim to encompass and address all or most of the above causes. A particular challenge is posed by the complexity of effectively addressing the ‘demand’ side of the phenomenon. In many cases “demand” may even be unaware that the person is a victim of the crime of trafficking. This challenge therefore requires a broad scope of efforts in public awareness raising, through the media, through education programs, through public debate and through the Churches.

Human trafficking is a rapidly growing and highly lucrative “international business” which inevitably leads to the destruction of the lives of hundreds of thousands of persons. The phenomenon is of international dimension and can only be adequately addressed by combined efforts.

The Church, including religious congregations, Catholic organizations and the faithful have a unique potential and – by default – the obligation to engage in a coordinated global effort to combat trafficking in human beings.

What the Church can do

Prevention and awareness raising: supporting and undertaking prevention activities, predominantly through awareness raising. The raising awareness activities can be targeted at risk groups, (e.g. to people who actively intend to migrate in search of a job away from home, within or outside one’s own country, to migrants in an irregular situation, or to groups who due to their circumstances are more at risk of falling victim to the crime of trafficking), educators and professionals (such as doctors, priests, nurses, non specialised social workers and government officials), or to the general public.

Assistance to trafficked persons: providing secure shelter for trafficked persons in the countries of destination, transit and origin (for repatriated trafficked persons); providing individual social, medical, psychological and legal assistance, as well as vocational training to empower trafficked persons professionally. Effective assistance requires trans-national cooperation and networking; in this respect networking and cooperation with religious orders of sisters will be particularly valuable and effective. Fully respecting the religious plurality of trafficked persons and if it is possible, effective assistance should also pay particular attention to the spiritual healing of the trafficked persons and to their full spiritual and mental rehabilitation, in order to enable them to deal with the lifelong suffering that invariably is caused by trafficking.

Advocacy: Political advocacy work is as important as the assistance for trafficked persons, and should particularly address the root causes of trafficking, with a focus on advocating for alternatives for vulnerable groups. Advocacy in countries of destination and towards international institutions should specifically aim at ensuring that appropriate legislation is in place and is being properly enforced at national and international level to protect trafficked persons, to punish traffickers and to guarantee the rights of trafficked persons but also towards migration policies and economic policies that reduce vulnerability of people to trafficking. Finally, advocacy should highlight the need for eradication of forced labour and promotion of decent working conditions.

Networking: It is very important to work, both nationally and internationally, in interdisciplinary networks, where the cooperation between authorities, NGOs and international organizations improves. At the same time there is a need to network within the Church and Church-related organizations, in order to strengthen collaboration and coordination of different efforts, as well as

with ecumenical partners in other churches. Networking should aim at improving the trans-national assistance and protection to trafficked persons. Networking is also a tool for joint advocacy work in seeking the improvement of legislation at international and national levels and their enforcement.

For this purpose, Christian organizations including Caritas members that are engaged or wish to become engaged in combating trafficking in humans may use already existing instrument and tool within the Caritas Internationalis network – Christian Organizations Against Trafficking in humans NETwork (COATNET). The Network offers forums for discussions and exchange of practices, capacity building, it advocates at the global level on behalf of the members, as well as facilitates cooperation between members and with stakeholders (www.coatnet.org).

In March 2014, an interreligious network against trafficking was established (Global Freedom Network - GFN) by the Pope Francis, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Walk Free Foundation. COATNET as a network of practitioners collaborates with the GFN and contributes with its professional knowledge to realization of the GFN's strategy.

How to start

- Help prevent and raise awareness in basic Christian communities, schools, parishes and social centers about trafficking through homilies, discussions and in other relevant moments. Inform them about dangers to be trafficked, to become a prey to unscrupulous recruitment agencies, necessity of keeping documents and other dangers (consult website of COATNET www.coatnet.org for more information)
- Organize prayers and information events on the International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking (International Day of Trafficking, 8 February, St. Bakhita Day), promoted by the Pontifical Council of Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the International Union of Superiors General (UISG and USG). Prayer materials can be consulted at www.coatnet.org
- Develop projects aimed at offering assistance to victims, in particular legal and psycho-social and spiritual support
- Establish collaboration with other local organizations assisting victims (for referral and hotlines) and law enforcement organizations, build alliances. Join COATNET for better coordination of faith-based strategy and joint voice at the international arena
- Advocate for anti-trafficking laws and their enforcement in your country
- Develop your own guidelines according to your local context

Good Practices that can be replicated in your context

Project Caritas Sri Lanka, Caritas Lebanon and Caritas Nepal: Networking between labour sending and receiving countries to prevent labour exploitation and assist victims.

Caritas Sri Lanka disseminates information about the services provided by Caritas Lebanon and Caritas Jordan to migrants and victims of trafficking and their shelters among aspirant migrants during the pre-departure awareness programmes. Caritas Sri Lanka assists families of those who became victims of human trafficking in Lebanon and Jordan. When informed, Caritas Lebanon and Caritas Jordan locate the victim and shares the information by visiting them at detention centres and employer's houses. Caritas Sri Lanka provides airport assistance to such victims on their arrival.

International Advocacy

Caritas Internationalis, together with international civil society organizations, participated in the process of lobbying for a convention on decent work for domestic workers including migrants and

minors of age. This convention (ILO Convention 189/2011) was adopted during ILC 2011 and then opened for ratification. CI prepared a guide for its MOs explaining the Convention so that they could take up the challenge to do advocacy work at national level and request their respective national governments to amend legislation, make it more favorable for domestic workers and align it with the Convention to become ready to ratify it. In the same guide CI analyses some of the articles in the convention that are very relevant for minor domestic workers and for migrant domestic workers. For migrant domestic workers there are important provisions such as a contract that should be signed prior to departure from country of origin and should be valid in country of destination. There are also provisions for monitoring international recruitment agencies and sanctions for those not playing by the rules. There is also the principle of access to redress mechanisms. For all these reasons it is very important to promote the ratification of this convention to protect the rights of all domestic workers including migrants that would also prevent trafficking.

CI has organized/attended various events to promote the convention ratification and witnesses from national Caritas attended some of them or CI advocacy officers told their stories to international audiences to make them understand better the seriousness of the issue and the importance of ensuring that domestic work becomes formal work and is regulated by law and national agreements.

National Advocacy

Secours Catholique – Caritas France has sought to pool knowledge and civil society expertise by means of creating large civil society national network to follow the implementation of “French National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking 2014 – 2016”. The Collective of 23 French organisations called “Together Against Human Trafficking” (*Ensemble contre la traite des êtres humains*) coordinated by Secours Catholique met several Government officials to remind the Government that the implementation of the National Action Plan is of paramount importance.

The National Action Plan is now enacted and pending implementation which is a major step towards better prevention and protection measures for victims of human trafficking. Secours Catholique and its partners will be vigilant about the implementation of the plan: sufficient funds should be allocated, and all forms of human trafficking should be fought, with due regard to all victims, especially most vulnerable such as children.

Project on awareness raising among community religious leaders

Caritas Albania coordinates joint initiatives taken together with the Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Churches in Albania to raise awareness against trafficking. An ecumenical group, including Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant church leaders, was created to join forces against trafficking. The National Coordinator on Trafficking and Ministry of Internal Affairs also participates in the meetings of the group. It organizes training programmes for youth that are involved in social activities in their parishes and for women groups, meets public institutions responsible for combating trafficking such as police (for referring victims to the services provided by the Churches), prisons (offering social and training services for women victims). The group also organizes joint awareness raising campaigns at national level for each community.

Activities of the group include also participation of Muslim communities. The group also established cooperation with clergy and religious, in particular with priests, religious sisters and imams, from neighboring countries such as Macedonia and Kosovo.

Projects above might be taken as examples for replication in one's context. COATNET members may share more details from their experience and in certain cases may provide technical assistance. You may find more information about the network's work on our website: www.coatnet.org