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**ISSUES OF RESETTLEMENT  
INITIATIVES FROM VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS**

*The Challenge of Resettling Those Who Have Been Trafficked,  
With Special Reference to Nigeria*

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## **1. Introduction**

I wish to express my gratitude to the President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences Professor Margaret S. Archer and Chancellor Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo for inviting me to take part in this comprehensive and important Plenary Session dedicated to examining Human Trafficking: Issues Beyond Criminalization. It is an honour and pleasure to have the opportunity to share with you some of my experiences in the field of rescuing and reintegrating victims into day-to-day life after periods of enslavement and exploitation.

I am a Consolata missionary sister and I spent 24 years of my missionary life in Kenya. In 1993, I was asked to return to Italy to work as a missionary in my own country. I began working with immigrant women, first in the northern city of Turin where I encountered the brutality of human trafficking for sexual exploitation and its devastating effects on the victims. Since January 2000, I have served in Rome as the Coordinator of the National Counter-Trafficking Office for the Italian Conference of Women Religious (USMI); and since December 2013, as the President of the association “Slaves No More.” The main aim of this association is to assist trafficking victims return to their home countries with dignity – assisting reintegration and resettlement into day-to-day life through the means of personalized financial projects and support.

My contribution to today’s session is drawn from my many years of personal commitment and experience working alongside with hundreds of women religious and other organizations in Italy and abroad to create a strong and effective network in response to the emergency of modern-day slavery. Traffickers are very well organised in identifying, trapping and transporting their victims – or “goods to be sold” as they see them – so we, soldiers in the battle against human trafficking, must be equally responsive, strategic and committed in order to rescue and save such victims. Even more, we must build on our efforts to prevent traffickers from making victims of the multitudes of poor and vulnerable woman and children around the globe in the first place.

We must collectively acknowledge that slavery still exists in the year 2015 – and this is a great shame for our modern society. Moreover, it is a challenge for our institutions and for all of us as citizens concerned for the welfare of each person created in God’s image -- and not to be treated like a slave. We are also asked to offer our contribution to create a society free from all forms of slavery, violence and exploitation. Unfortunately, several million people, mainly women and children, are still treated like commodities that can be bought and sold in brothels, bars and the main and back streets of our towns and villages. No woman or child chooses to be a prostitute, but too often in today’s world they find themselves in that brutal and life-draining circumstance due to poverty and vulnerability.

It is important to note that modern-day slavery takes many forms – trafficking for illegal child adoption and begging, organ smuggling, child soldiers, unpaid/unfairly paid labour and domestic servitude, forced marriage and surrogate mothers, as well as many other forms. Given my specific experience and engagement with the topic over the last 22 years, my intervention today will focus on the phenomenon of forced prostitution of women and children, and the challenge of resettling those who have been trafficked, with a special reference to Nigeria.

## **2. My Entry into the “World of the Night”**

The call to this ministry for trafficked women (mainly from developing countries) came to me more than 20 years ago -- in 1993 -- when after being a missionary in Kenya for 24 years, I was asked to return to Italy for a new missionary challenge: to work with immigrant women in the northern city of Turin. There, a Nigerian woman enslaved by the “sex industry” came to the Caritas Drop-In Centre where I was serving. Sick, in Italy illegally with no right to medical care, she turned to our Caritas Centre for help. Upon hearing her cry for help, my missionary life changed radically.

Her name was Maria; she was 30 years old and the mother of three children she had left behind in Nigeria. She came to Italy hoping to get a job to support her children, and much of the rest of her

family. Instead she was forced on the street – a victim of the slave trade that was just starting to emerge in Italy. At that time, I had no knowledge that thousands of young women were being exported, like commodities, from poor countries to meet the demands of an affluent western society where everything can be bought and sold -- even the body of a young foreign girl.

I helped Maria with her basic needs, while in return she helped me to enter into the complexity of the “world of the night and of the streets.” Gradually I came to understand the mechanisms of trafficking and traffickers who take advantage of the poverty and lack of education of young girls in many countries of origin, entrapping and exploiting them for lucrative gain. Moreover, I heard the cry for help from these victims, like Maria, and I came to understand their deep suffering and humiliation in being forced to sell their bodies, as well as their youth and their dreams.

As a woman and as a missionary, I was offended and indignant to see the lives of so many young women -- dreaming for a better future for themselves and their families -- destroyed by others' lust, greed and power. Very soon, I turned to other nuns who were also touched by the phenomenon and ready to open the “holy doors” of their convents to hide and protect trafficking victims running away from their torturers, pimps and madams.

Since then, the pages of my journals are filled with details of the thousands of victims I've encountered -- so many different names, but all with similar horrific stories. Many I met on the street at night and took into safe houses. Others I met in Caritas Centres asking for help. Others still I met in a centre for identification and repatriation (Ponte Galeria) on the outskirts of Rome, awaiting deportation because their traffickers stole their legal documents, making them undocumented and illegal. Still others, in hospitals severely injured after beatings at the hands of pimps or jealous clients or random street violence.

#### **Some cases of (extra)ordinary violence include:**

Mercy, forced to work the streets of the Italian port city of Bari. At 28, the mother of two young children left behind in Nigeria, she was shot one night by a passer-by. The bullet pierced her spine and left her paralysed. Our network of women religious in Italy and Nigeria assisted her in returning home in a wheelchair so she could see her family again – especially her children. She died a few months later, on an Easter Sunday. She completed her Way of the Cross.

Jennifer, 21, is one of the most recent cases of repatriation our network of nuns has assisted in Italy. Just a few weeks ago, she courageously ran away from her traffickers who cheated her and forced her to prostitute herself on the street. She turned to the Nigerian Embassy, who contacted our network of nuns who hid her in one of our shelters while waiting for legal documents to be processed by the highly supportive and collaborative Nigerian Embassy staff in Rome. Costs related to her return to Nigeria (e.g. airline fare, reintegration project) were covered by the association “Slaves No More.” I was so struck by the courage of this young woman, who before leaving wrote a note to the sisters thanking them for “not letting [her] die on the streets.” But how many women are still dying on the streets?

Gloria, 22, was forced to work on the streets in Italy to pay a large debt bond (inflated costs charged of victims by traffickers for their forced travel, rent, food, clothes...). Before leaving Nigeria, she was forced before the local witch doctor who performed “voodoo rituals” (also known as juju or black magic) which continued to have a very powerful hold on her psyche. A beautiful young woman, she became the favourite of a 38-year-old divorced man. He fell in love with her and wanted to bring her to his home, but she refused. As revenge, he threw Gloria from a bridge and her lifeless young body was found the next day by a fisherman passing by. Unfortunately, today many young women are still murdered on the streets, often as a warning to other victims to submit to their traffickers and deliver on 'promises' they were forced to make through voodoo rituals. In most cases, the murderers are never found and punished for their unspeakable crimes. How many more deaths on the streets do we need to see before justice is delivered for the victims?

Nancy, 14, was sold to human traffickers in Nigeria by an uncle. She was brought to Italy and forced onto the streets, and soon after rescued by police and sent to a shelter for children. In the process, she lost all contact with her family, and it was only after six years, thanks to the work of a network of religious congregations in Nigeria, that she was reunited with her mother – sent home in time to celebrate Christmas after a seven year absence.

Sonia, barely 18, was arrested during a police check on the outskirts of Rome. She had no legal documents (they were taken by her traffickers), so she was taken to the Centre for Identification and Expulsion in Rome. She shared with us that she was only 16 when she was brought to Italy by her three stepsisters who forced her to prostitute herself; and in 15 months had earned 55,000 EUR for her them. Due to her young age, she was much sought after by clients. Our network of religious sisters facilitated her release from the Centre, resettled her in a religious community shelter and registered her in a program of social reintegration for trafficked women. It is gut-wrenching and infuriating to realise that many times traffickers are members of a victim's family, making it more difficult for a young and vulnerable girl to escape the network enslaving her or muster the courage and clarity to testify against her own family in ways that will result in legal action.

### 3. **Trafficking: A Global Phenomenon**

A few facts on the global phenomenon of trafficking in human beings, mainly for sexual exploitation, will help us to better understand the magnitude of the problem and the great need for an appropriate pastoral ministry of liberation for thousands of victims through projects of prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

The trade in human beings, particularly of women and minors, has reached the borders of almost every country, drawing each into the evil chain of trafficking which runs through countries of origin, transit and destination of victims. Given its illicit nature, it is nearly impossible to identify the global number of victims; however, multiple statistics put it as high as 27 – 30 million. According to the United Nations, trafficking in persons generates an annual income of roughly \$32 billion -- behind only the trade of arms and drugs. Despite new efforts to protect and reintegrate victims, the danger of women's exploitation is ever present, with the risk of victims falling into slavery and submission due to their vulnerability and lack of alternative opportunities. Criminal mafias constantly change their strategies to ensure and protect the enormous financial earnings they reap; therefore, we too -- women religious and all people of faith and good will committed to ending slavery in our time -- must be equally organized to counteract this criminality and assist its needy victims.

Trafficking of human beings for sexual exploitation has developed into a global market, involving countries of **origin, transit and destination**.

- **Countries of Origin** represent the “push” or “supply” side of the equation. That is to say, they provide the breeding ground of poverty which traffickers comb to find potential victims. The women are easy targets, vulnerable from utter poverty, lack of education and job opportunities, gender inequality, discrimination and war.
- **Countries of Transit** offer several routes through which trafficked persons are taken to reach their final destination. Traffickers have perfected ways to import and export their victims without risk of being stopped and sent back to the country of origin.
- **Countries of Destination** represent the “pull” or “demand” factor, and even though the main culprit here is the “client”, other factors must also be considered in deciphering the global net of the sex industry – such as gender, desire for profit and power by the mafia, and other forms of international and trans-national organized crime. Nevertheless, the main protagonist of the perpetuation of trafficking for sexual exploitation remains the “client”, or “consumer”, who plays a key role in this business. He regulates the demand factor, and the supply corresponds to his demand.

#### 4. Root Causes of Human Trafficking

Prostitution is not a new phenomenon, it has longed been referred to as “the world’s oldest profession.” However, what is new is the globalization of the trade through networking forced sex workers (including minors) for the profit of others. Those caught in the trafficking network have become the 21<sup>st</sup> century slaves. Tricked, enslaved and forced onto the street or in night clubs to “prostitute” themselves; they are living examples of the unjust discrimination and abuse of women imposed by our consumer society. Why does it happen?

- **The status of women** around the world has long been under attack. Today, the face of poverty, marginalisation, discrimination and exploitation is female. Women represent 80% of those living in absolute poverty, and almost two-thirds of the 850 million illiterate adults in the world. More than half of those, mainly in developing countries, between the ages of 15 and 24, are infected with HIV/AIDS.
- **The objectification of women** is more dangerous, prevalent and relevant than ever. Modern media, in all its forms, continues to portray women as objects, and objects of pleasure and a source of gain for others. Media has created a ‘normalization’ about the abuse of women, their treatment as a commodity – and this attitude has helped fuel the multi-billion dollar business of global human trafficking.
- **The extreme poverty of many women** and their desire for emancipation from cultures and situations of submission and imposed inferiority. Too often, they risk everything--their life, dignity and identity--to enter a European country and lifestyle. Western world mass media creates and promulgates this “promised land” – and this is the dream that so many young women buy into, never to see it.
- **Minimum or total absence of education and/or work opportunities** often lead women down the road to sexual exploitation, especially African women, given access to resources is so limited. The attraction to/dream of “life in the west” is further fanned when African women (*mamans*, traffickers) return home with riches – made from exploiting other African women – and proudly display them.
- **Heavy family economic, physical and emotional burdens** – especially for many young African and Eastern European women, who so often leave family members and children home whom they expect to support with earnings from Italy, which makes them easy prey for traffickers and exploiters. Most victims are nearly illiterate, therefore, further vulnerable and easily lured. The majority of such young women, working in dehumanised conditions on the streets of our cities and country sides, come from Nigeria and from Eastern European countries; few others from Latin American and they are mostly recruited as dancers in night clubs.

#### 5. The Global Slave Trade: How & Why It’s Thriving

**The slavery chain is long:** To be a slave is to be chained. That chain robs its victims of freedom and subjects them to life under the will of another. Modern-day slavery is a chain of many links interconnected: **victims** with their poverty; **exploiters** with their huge profits; **consumers** with their sense of entitlement to easy pleasure and an escape from frustration, deep personal engagement and responsibility; **society** with its empty values and permissiveness; **governments** with their corrupt systems and complicity; the **Church** and every Christian, with our silence and indifference.

Pope Francis often has spoken of “the globalization of indifference,” which can be appropriately applied to this issue. Each of us must reflect and ask ourselves where we have not stood strongly against indifference – but also when we have tolerated ignorance, corruption, and exploitation that ultimately destroys the life, dreams and future of millions of women, children and men and boys desperately attempting to escape from material, moral or emotional poverty.

**Vulnerable victims buy into false promises:** A vision of the “promised land” – where jobs are available, money can be made, opportunities to help their families presented – compels victims to buy into traffickers’ schemes. They can travel for weeks or months over land, by air or sea. In the case of most Nigerians nowadays, they are forced to cross the Sahara Desert, wandering for months in dehumanized conditions before arriving either in Libya or Morocco (or a few other countries where traffickers’ networks facilitate illegal access to light boats) to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Thousands of victims (willing and forced) risk their lives to enter Italy (or other parts of Europe) with no legal document. Sadly, but not surprisingly, each year, hundreds of them do not survive either the desert or sea crossing.

**Trafficking networks are highly organized:** Unscrupulous traffickers, men and women, lure victims in countries where poverty is extreme, families large, and there is little access to education and opportunities for a better life. Exploiting this socio-economic situation, and knowing they face huge profits and relatively low risk, today’s slave traders mislead women and their families with promises of a remunerative and dignified work abroad. Women and children are brought to “developed” countries by illegal means, aided by the complicity of corrupt employees and officers in embassies, airports, customs and immigration offices, travel agents, landlords of apartments, hotel owners and taxi drivers. *Yes, it takes a village to traffic a victim.* On reaching their destination (most often one chosen for the victim; not where she wanted to go), traffickers confiscate all of the victim’s legal travel documents – and in doing so, steal her name, identity and freedom. Victims gradually lose a sense of who they are.

**Savvy recruitment strategies:** Traffickers are constantly evolving their methods of recruitment and transfer of victims. They are poised to take advantage of young people arriving on our coasts in Italy, attempting to escape poverty, war and instability in their countries of origin. Immediately, they are approached by ill-intended traffickers who advise them to request legal documentation as an asylum seeker which provides legal protection and the status of refugee. This documentation allows its holder to remain in Italy under a special permit for several months (or even years) before a case will be heard by a special commission which will determine whether the holder is approved or denied the opportunity to remain in Italy. During this lengthy period, young women are introduced and tricked by traffickers and madams into the sex industry, mainly on the streets, without the risk for traffickers that the victim will be deported back to their home country.

**Lack of awareness and prevention campaigns:** There is a vital need to work on prevention efforts in countries of origin by informing people in schools, parishes, youth groups and the media about what is really happening to young people searching opportunities for a better future. There is equally a great need in countries of destination to make people aware that this kind of slavery is flourishing because there is an indefatigable demand for such a service.

## **6. Trafficked Victims: Challenges of Resettling**

Sexual abuse degrades a person on multiple levels – physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. The act can empty its victim of her deepest values, destroy her self-esteem, confuse her concepts of love, life, womanhood and femininity, and undermine her dream – and real possibilities – of a bright future. After any time on the street, for survival, a victim usually assumes a posture of self-defence, expressed by vulgarity, violence and aggression. She lives a contradictory reality: in one moment she is courted by the “client,” and in the next she can be criticized, condemned and rejected by the very consumer society that uses and abuses her. She lives in isolation and carries within herself a strong sense of guilt and shame. Restoring her balance and harmony is not an easy or a quick task; it is complex, complicated and long-term.

In walking with a victim through the process of rescue to reintegration, women religious in Italy (and throughout our networks) are forced to negotiate the following critical aspects of this phenomenon:

- Victims have no legal documents (confiscated by traffickers; therefore they are in Italy illegally;
- Illegal, victims have no right to health care or insurance, while many suffer from STDs, HIV/AIDS or physical ailments due to maltreatment and/or beatings;
- Cultural barriers at times create tension and problems, especially in shelters where we have victims of different nationalities, languages and backgrounds;
- Traffickers rarely share profits with victims; therefore, victims are without money to cover housing, food or any basic needs.
- The majority of victims in Italy, mainly Nigerians, arrive with little education, and as a result have few job opportunities and face discrimination due to their African background;
- Trafficking victims carry deep psychological wounds – depression, suicidal tendencies, loss of psycho-physical identity, self-objectification, trust issues, and sense of guilt;
- Victims suffer emotional wounds – shame, guilt, fear, lack of self-esteem, at times they respond with a defensive/aggressive manner;
- Labelled as “prostitutes,” trafficking victims carry a heavy stigma – treated as social outcasts and marginalised;
- Many victims become pregnant while working the street (or by client “boyfriends”) and then must provide for their children, which can further complicate their issues of recovery and reintegration;
- Victims can need/desire to return to their country of origin for family reconciliation, complicated by the shame they face returning home with no money to support their families’ basic needs (most often a key reason why they travelled abroad) and by what has happened to them;
- Victims can need/desire to remain in Italy because they have no opportunities, no family (or family that might re-traffic them), and no support in their country of origin;
- Many victims need proper protection from traffickers and madams; therefore our shelters need to be protected, kept secret, and accessible to only limited visitors;
- Limited funds for USMI Counter-Trafficking Office and network of 100 nun-run convents-turned-shelters (See additional points below).

## **7. The Nigerian Context**

Each year the U.S. State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons issues the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report that ranks governments based on their perceived efforts to acknowledge and combat human trafficking. It serves as the world’s most comprehensive resource of governmental anti-human trafficking efforts and its ultimate goals are freeing victims, preventing trafficking and bringing traffickers to justice.

Following is an excerpt from the 2014 TIP Report’s findings on Nigeria: “[It] is a source, transit and destination country for women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. ...Victims are recruited from rural, and to a lesser extent, urban areas... women and girls for domestic servitude and sex trafficking; boys for forced labor, domestic servitude, stone quarrying, agriculture. Nigerian traffickers rely on threats of voodoo curses to control Nigerian victims and force them into situations of prostitution or labor. Nigerian women and children are taken from Nigeria to other West and Central African countries as well as South Africa. Nigerian women and girls -- primarily from Benin City in Edo State -- are subjected to forced prostitution in Italy, while Nigerian women and girls from other states are subjected to forced prostitution in other Western and Eastern European countries.



Nigerian gangs subject large numbers of Nigerian women into forced prostitution in the Czech Republic and Italy...and the European Police Organization (EUROPOL) has identified Nigerian organized crime related to trafficking in persons as one of the largest law enforcement challenges to European governments.

The Government of Nigeria does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so....increasing the number of trafficking investigations and convictions and by providing extensive specialized anti-trafficking training to official from various government ministries and agencies. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP) increased protection efforts.....Despite the growing number of Nigerian trafficking victims identified abroad, the government has yet to implement formal procedures for the return and reintegration of Nigerian victims."

But there is hope. Each year the U.S. Department of State honors individuals around the world for their exceptional and tireless efforts to eradicate human trafficking – even in the face of resistance, opposition and threats to their lives – and this year, a Nigerian – Mrs. Jedy-Agba – is among 10 TIP Heroes featured in the 2014 TIP Report.

## 8. The Italian Context

At the beginning of the 1980s, following ongoing economic difficulties in developing countries, thousands of women came to Europe in search of work and a better quality of life. Illegal, poor and vulnerable, many became the prey of international and trans-national criminal organisations linked to the sex industry. Italy was not exempt from this phenomenon; and given its geography, lends itself to easy entry by slave traders looking to “sell women” to satisfy the demand of millions of consumers.

Very soon in this phenomenon, young women tried to run away from their traffickers and started asking for protection and assistance. Religious Congregations, together with other volunteer groups, were among the first to read this new “*sign of the times*,” and offered victims alternative solutions to a life on the streets. Almost immediately, nuns opened the doors of their convents to hide victims running away from their exploiters.

At the outset, they faced many difficulties in assisting the victims – language barriers, cultural differences, moral conflicts, public opinion and, mainly, addressing the illegal status of the victims. Very soon, by listening to their dramatic stories, the nuns came to understand that their “work” as prostitutes was not a choice they had made, but that they were dealing with a **new form of slavery**.

This situation challenged our values, attitudes, traditions and our security, while at the same time it demanded immediate answers. Some female congregations responded positively with a prophetic intuition by providing shelters, language courses, training skills and job opportunities for the victims they encountered. In this new environment, victims were also able to heal their deep psychological and spiritual wounds caused by this humiliating experience. They were helped to regain their sense of self-worth, trust and hope. A major obstacle however remained: having no personal documents, these victims could not claim any legal rights in Italy. In recent years, a powerful partnership has been forged with the Nigerian Embassy in Rome and more than 6,000 passports have been issued to Nigerian trafficking victims – opening the possibility for legal assistance in Italy and/or safe travel back to Nigeria.

**The protection and rehabilitation** of victims of human trafficking has been implemented legally in Italy since **July 25, 1998**, through the application of a special residence permit granted for social protection and reintegration under **Legislative Immigration Decree No. 286**. The main motive behind this Italian law was the will and need to stop trafficking in human beings by ensuring traffickers were brought to justice, as well as supporting and assisting victims in breaking their

chains of exploitation and enslavement. (See Section 10 for more on Legislative Immigration Decree No. 286.)

## 9. The Nigerian-Italian Connection

In 1993, I began working with the phenomenon of women imported from developing countries to satisfy the burgeoning demand for commercial sex present in industrialised Italian cities. In the northern city of Turin (Torino) alone, 3,000 women were living and travelling mainly at night in throughout the areas five different regions: Piedmont, Lombardy, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna and Valle d'Aosta. At this time, Turin came to be known as the Capital of Nigeria in Italy.

Another zone where hundreds of Nigerians nowadays live and work is the Domitiana Highway that leads from Naples up the coast of Italy. Built in 95 AD, in recent years the highway has been used to prostitute hundreds of Nigerian girls at a time. Some of them are young, some with children, most have husbands and families they left behind in Nigeria, all of them are vulnerable victims, trapped in the brutal supply and demand of the commercial sex industry.

Today in Italy alone, between 70,000 and 100,000 young women—mainly from Nigeria, Eastern Europe and Latin America—are displayed for sale on our streets. Many are minors, as young as 14 years old. As they are brought to Italy illegally, it is impossible to know exactly how many they are, who they are and where they are or where they come from. Nevertheless, we know that Nigerian women still make up the majority of trafficking victims in Italy: close to 50%.

At the beginning of the Nigerian trafficking trade, victims used to cross several countries before reaching their final destination in Europe/Italy. They could have gone through Greece, Russia, Bulgaria, Holland, Germany, Spain and France, travelling for weeks or months over land, by air, or sea. In recent years, trafficking routes and methods have changed, and we see that traffickers run victims across the Sahara Desert to avoid having to apply for legal documents for them.

Once in Italy, victims' passports or documents are confiscated never to be returned; leaving them as persons with no identity, no name, no nationality and no legal status. They gradually lose the sense of who they are. This applies especially to the Nigerian women and girls who are also subjected by criminal organizations to "*voodoo rituals*" (also referred to as juju or black magic). Among African women, cases of mental illness or breakdown are frequent since *voodoo* has a very powerful hold on their psyche and they fear reprisal against their families back home.

Nigerian victims are entrusted to a "*maman*," a Nigerian women who oversees the "business" of each victim, and who very often is a former victim of sexual slavery herself. A "*maman*" is responsible for new recruits, teaching them how to work the streets, parcelling out the stretch of street where they are to work, collecting (or confiscating) their earnings, punishing them in cases of resistance, and above all, controlling them psychologically with the ill effects of the "*voodoo rites*."

On the competitive sex market, African women are considered "second class" and therefore get a lower price for their services. For a routine affair in a car, they agree to 10-15 euro whereas Eastern European trafficking victims can ask 25 euro. Under that scenario, for a Nigerian trafficking victim to earn enough money to pay off a debt bond (contracted with the traffickers who recruited them and brought them to Italy), which averages 60,000 - 80,000 euro, she must engage in a minimum of 4,000 sexual transactions (usually intercourse). In addition to the initial debt bond, traffickers also require her to cover monthly expenses which include and can average 100 euro for food, 250 euro for lodging, 250 euro for the "joint" (work site), in addition to clothing, transport and random personal needs. To repay their debt, they have to "work" every day or every night (often both), seven days a week for not less than two or three years.

Every trafficking victim is vulnerable to the dangers of the street: maltreatment, abuse, road accidents and even death; and each year several girls are killed on the streets of Italy, either by jealous or deranged clients, street violence, or at the hands of their traffickers in front of other victims as a deliberately cruel and effective tactic for preventing others from running away. They

run the high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, as Italian clients tend not to use condoms. Ten to 15% of women on the street in Italy are registered HIV+. Many women become pregnant, especially during the “breaking-in period” (repeated gang rape) performed during their period of forced transit, even resulting in some children being born in the desert – though often traffickers deal with unwanted pregnancy by forced abortion. For African women, who hold maternity as the highest value, abortion represents not only the killing of a new life, but also of a culture.

## **10. From Victims to Citizens: Women Religious Helping Women**

The Italian Union of Major Superiors (USMI), a conference of women religious, coordinates the critical ministry of all women religious. In 2000, in response to a “sign of the times,” USMI established a Counter-Trafficking Office responsible for growing, training and supporting the network of religious congregations working on the issue. The following are some ways in which women religious are present and bear prophetic witness in dealing with restoring human rights and dignity to trafficking victims include:

- **Convents-Turned-Shelters/Safe Houses:** Over the last 15 years, women religious in the counter-trafficking network I manage responded to the phenomenon by opening the “holy doors” of their convents to convert them into safe houses for more than 6,000 girls and young women rescued from the grips of human trafficking. Today, 250 sisters - belonging to 80 congregations - work in more than 100 safe houses (projects) throughout Italy, often in collaboration with Caritas, other public or private bodies, volunteers and associations, while maintaining their identity motivated by the Gospel imperative. These small family houses offer hospitality to 6-8 victims at a time, for a period of 6 - 12 months (or longer for programs of social, legal, financial and spiritual re-integration). The victims come from different countries, some pregnant, some already mothers with children left behind in their countries of origin who anxiously await their return (which may or may not happen). These trafficking victims have been loved, cared for, invested in and reintegrated into mainstream society so that they can either make a new life in Italy or return to their home countries under a specially financed project launched in 2013 for personal, social and working rehabilitation. Our shelters see young and old nuns living together with rescued victims sharing meals, prayer, daily running of the house, language learning, and other useful skills and education -- a radical divergence from life on the streets that provides deep healing. The family atmosphere -- infused with Christ's example of unconditional love -- offers victims the safe space necessary to face their trauma, heal their wounds, and be understood in their moments of rebellion and frustration. I visit such shelters to meet and support the sisters in their delicate daily task of guiding the rebuilding of victims' lives, assist in bridging cultural and language barriers, assist in obtaining legal documents for victims and counsel victims on the great importance of the time spent in a religious shelter to prepare them for a better future. In these shelters, I am referred to as “the old mama,” and consistently am called to assist victims in dealing with their internal and external tensions and difficulties;
- **Restoring legal status** through assisting victims in the acquisition of legal documents. Since 2000, when the new USMI Counter-Trafficking Office was opened, more than 4,000 passports have been issued by the Nigerian Embassy in Rome to victims of exploitation in compliance with the issuance of residence permits under Italian human trafficking legislation. They were issued upon the identification of victims by the approved associations in our network, since none of the victims could produce a birth certificate or other legal document. Today process has become more complicated due to traffickers' methods of using victims' finger prints with false names, dates and documents. All costs of restoring legal documentation for victims is covered by the shelters;
- **Collaboration with relevant embassies** to obtain necessary identification documents;
- **Outreach units** as a first contact with the victims on the streets;

- **Drop-in Centres** to identify the problems of women in search of assistance;
- **Programmes** of social reintegration;
- **Professional/vocational preparation** through language, skills and job training;
- **Psychological and spiritual support** to assist survivors in rediscovering their cultural roots and faith, to regain their self-respect and heal the deep wounds of their experience;
- **Weekly Visits to the Centre for Identification and Expulsion:** Starting in 2003, 60 nuns from 27 congregations and 28 countries (mainly from those countries with the most trafficking victims in Italy), entered behind the prison walls of the Centre for Identification and Expulsion (Ponte Galeria) on the outskirts of Rome, often “home” to more than 150 trafficking victims at a time. The sisters offer prayer, listening, comfort and counsel, most often in the trafficking victim's mother tongue. This is a place of great suffering, but that is alleviated to some extent by sharing our concern and compassion with these women who often wait months on end before being forcefully deported – most because they were found to be in Italy with no legal documents. (Traffickers confiscate all legal documents in order to control victims’ movement.);
- **Working as a global network** is the greatest strength and key to success in this ministry. Traffickers are professional networkers – so women religious working on this issue must be, too, in countries of origin, transit and destination. Together we work toward more informed consultation and greater cooperation with government, law enforcement, NGOs, Caritas, religious and faith-based organisations in order to be more effective in eradicating this 21<sup>st</sup> century slavery, with the goal to eliminate corruption, illicit profits and the great demand from millions of “consumers” of paid sex. Unfortunately, even today, the issue of ‘demand’ from consumers is very seldom addressed or highlighted in existing networks.

## 11. The Italian Response: Government and Legislation

To understand the aim and importance **of the reintegration of victims** of human trafficking by facilitating their resettlement either in host countries or in countries of origin it is important to outline some key steps already achieved in the Italian context.

**The protection and rehabilitation** of victims of human trafficking has been implemented legally in Italy since **July 25, 1998**, through the application of a special residence permit granted for social protection and reintegration under **Legislative Immigration Decree No. 286**. With this legislation, Italy is a pioneer among European countries, providing a systemic framework for issuing a **residence permit** in recognition and support of victims of exploitation, as well as cracking down on trafficking and traffickers. A person can receive assistance and protection with this resident permit when s/he is:

- a victim of violence or exploitation and forced into prostitution;
- ready to leave prostitution and requests assistance, either from police or from some NGO;
- willing to go through a social rehabilitation programme, in a protected house or shelter;
- willing to testify against the traffickers;
- in danger of further violence, due to the testimony given about her/his traffickers.

**Legislative Immigration Decree No. 286 provides victims with:**

- **a resident permit** for six months, that can be renewed for another six months while the victim applies for a legal passport;
- **possibility to renew the resident permit** or extend it for a period equivalent to the term of a work contract, if the person concerned is already employed, or if s/he is attending a course;
- **eligibility for a study program** when proper institutional requirements are met.

For the implementation of this legislation the government has allocated a budget for approved NGOs holding special programmes for counter-trafficking activities and rehabilitation of victims. Unfortunately, today financial help is no longer available as it was and as it should be, therefore most victim shelters in Italy are now run by women's congregations or charitable organisations with no governmental financial support.

In February 2012, the European Union approved a new legislation on counter-trafficking, similar to Italy's Immigration Decree No. 286, giving special attention to protection and reintegration of victims, and binding all European Member States to implement the new legislation within the period of 2013-2015.

## **12. The Nigerian Response: Women Religious for Repatriation & Reintegration**

In the last 15 years, since we started coordinating with Nigerian communities on counter-trafficking initiatives, two shelters have been opened; one in Benin City in 2007, and one in Lagos in 2009. Both have offered accommodation to more than 100 victims who returned home on a voluntary basis, while several thousand have been repatriated by the Italian government due to lack of documents.

The shelter in Benin City is an 18-bed resource centre, the tangible result of cooperation between Italy and Nigeria. This is the first such shelter to be built in Nigeria and run by women religious. It was fully funded by the Italian Bishops Conference (CEI) and is facilitated by the Nigerian Conference of Women Religious.

The shelter in Lagos was opened in May 2009, and serves as a new office and shelter. This is a strategic centre dealing mainly with the local government, religious authority and associations, as well as facilitating reintegration of returning victims at the airport.

In recent months, a program of assisted repatriation for women, mainly mothers with children, who request assistance in returning to Nigeria (a vast majority do so from Italy), with dignity and financial means to rebuild their lives has been rolled out. In 2013, the Italian association "Slaves No More ONLUS" was created to provide oversight for this much-needed program. Under it, victims who wish to repatriate are provided with air fare, a budget for a personal reintegration working project planned and implemented in cooperation with the Nigerian sisters operating in shelters in Benin City and Lagos.

Under the program of Resettlement with Voluntary Repatriation and Financed Social Reintegration Project, trafficking victims who choose to resettle in their own country are assisted in a multitude of ways. To date, "Slaves No More" has fully assisted and repatriated 12 women and 8 children born in Italy under different circumstances.

The Resettlement with Voluntary Repatriation and Financed Social Reintegration Project utilizes the networks of women religious to:

- Counsel victims in Italy about opportunities available to them upon return to Nigeria (e.g. location, vocational/education programs);
- Resettle mothers and children into private apartments, on their own, with their monthly rent paid by the association "Slaves No More" for two years;
- Register children in school while assisting mothers in launching their own small businesses;
- Covers costs for continuing education for young women who wish to go to school;
- Meet a newly repatriated woman (and her children) at the airport with a warm welcome, transfer to the shelter and later accompany them into their new situation and settlement;

- Make advance arrangements to assist a returnee in taking on a specific project on return. A returnee can remain in the shelter in Lagos, with religious sisters to assist her with readjustment to a new life and situation in Nigeria;

Most of the women who returned to Nigeria under the auspices of this project have chosen and been supported in starting their own business – general stores, grocery store, provision store, mini-mart, tailoring, hair salon. One repatriated trafficking victim was accepted to university and is currently attending.

### 13. Counter-Trafficking: The Church Teaching and Leading

Given the global and vicious nature of human trafficking, we are extremely blessed to have the unparalleled care, concern and leadership of Pope Francis on this issue. From the early days of his Pontificate, we have heard him saying: “human trafficking is modern-day slavery” and this practice is a “crime against humanity.” As Prof. Margaret Archer, President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, noted in her letter to participants of this Plenary Session: “...each statement has been crucial in shaping the leadership that the Catholic Church has assumed and the agenda she has adopted in spearheading a social movement opposing this morally horrendous treatment of human persons....” therefore we should feel compelled to join together and move forward with courage and determination.

In support of this new vision of the Church at the service of marginalized people the world over who are entangled in the dehumanizing net of human trafficking, I’d like to note two important initiatives which have recently taken place:

- **“The Faith Leaders’ Universal Declaration Against Slavery”** was signed in the Vatican on December 2, 2015. Pope Francis, in collaboration with several other church leaders, convened this historic initiative to inspire action by all global faiths and people of good will to eradicate slavery across the globe by 2020. In all, 12 different religions or Christian churches were represented.<sup>1</sup> The event garnered significant global media attention.
- **The First International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking** was organized and launched on February 8, 2015, by the international network of women religious Talitha KUM and the USMI Counter-Trafficking Office, in collaboration with several Pontifical Councils and with the full support of Pope Francis. The event took place on the liturgical feast of St. Josephine Bakhita, a Sudanese slave who became a saint. This special day aimed to more actively involve Bishops’ Conferences, Christian communities, media and organizations worldwide to combat this global scourge. “No more slaves, but brothers and sisters” was the central theme used for prayer, reflection and awareness. Many countries, dioceses and media the world over gave great attention to this event. In Rome, the day was celebrated with a special Prayer Vigil, organised in collaboration with the Pope John XXIII Association, attended by hundreds of people from all walks of life – Cardinals to institutional leaders, religious and Christian communities, rescued victims and associations. A Eucharistic Celebration was also organized on Sunday, February 8, concelebrated by Cardinals, Bishops, religious and lay people. The celebration was followed by Pope Francis’ Angelus in St. Peter’s Square, recalling victims of trafficking and slavery. An online initiative included “lighting a candle” to enlighten

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis; Her Holiness Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma); Venerable Bhikkhuni Thich Nu Chan Khong (representing Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh); The Most Ven. Datuk K Sri Dhammaratana, Chief High Priest of Malaysia; Rabbi Dr. Abraham Skorka; Rabbi Dr. David Rosen; Dr. Abbas Abdalla Abbas Soliman, Undersecretary of State of Al Azhar Alsharif (representing Mohamed Ahmed El-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar); Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi al-Modarresi; Sheikh Naziyah Razzaq Jaafar, Special advisor of Grand Ayatollah (representing Grand Ayatollah Sheikh Basheer Hussain al Najafi; Sheikh Omar Abboud; Most Revd and Right Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury; His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel of France (representing His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew).

the world against human trafficking; Pope Francis joined others the world over in this initiative (<http://a-light-against-human-trafficking.info>).

#### 14. Conclusion: A Call For Action

In responding to the demands of a world in constant change and need, we are each called to offer our contribution to free the slaves of today's global human trade. Each one of us has a role to play so that, as Pope Francis implores, there might be **“no more slaves, but only brothers and sisters.”**

According to each specific role and function, we call upon:

- **The Global Economy:** to develop strong and fair economic systems to offer opportunities to women for a better life, without being forced to sell their bodies to survive;
- **The State:** to draft and apply legislation to suppress and punish trafficking in persons and protect, legalize and reintegrate victims;
- **The Global Family:** to demand effective legal measures to prosecute those involved in sexual exploitation, and to safeguard the family values of fidelity, love and unity;
- **The Church:** to advance its Christian vision of sexuality and man-woman relationships, to safeguard and promote the dignity of every woman created in God's image;
- **The Schools:** to impart to our children, the next generation, values based on mutual respect for gender;
- **The Global Media** to project a complete, balanced and accurate image of women that restores her to her full human value, presenting her as a powerful subject and not an object.

Only by working together will we find success in our efforts to break the invisible chain of modern-day slavery – a crime against humanity that binds tens of millions of victims the world over. So, we, as members and friends of mainly faith-based organizations with common Christian values, having different roles and responsibilities, but belonging to the same Human Family, are called to action. Let us commit ourselves to combating traffickers and freeing their victims with three Rs: rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration.

I will end with the words of our distinguished host, Margaret Archer, President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences: « This Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (PASS) has the responsibility not simply of adding our voices in unison but of carrying the movement forward by giving ‘moral outrage’ new elements of a concrete Agenda for eliminating this Crime against Humanity – in both its causes and its consequences. »

So may we all go forward, with that responsibility, as well as with the sense of rediscovery of our own prophetic roles and contributions to bringing an end to modern-day slavery in our time, and uplifted in knowing that none of us is working alone – but in collaboration, not competition or isolation. As we are called in Isaiah 1:17, “seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan and plead for the widow.” These are the most vulnerable of God's people, and among them are victims of human trafficking. Let us not forsake them, as God has not forsaken us.

Thank you for your attention.

Sr. Eugenia Bonetti, MC

*\* Editorial contributions made by Amy Roth Sandrolini, former Public Affairs Coordinator at the U.S. Embassy to the Holy See.*

## RESOURCES

### BOOKS/PROCEEDINGS

- Schiave (Slaves), published in Italian and Polish language, by Sr. Eugenia Bonetti & Anna Pozzi. Ed. San Paolo, 2015
- Spezzare le Catene (Breaking the Chains), published in Italian and Portuguese language, by Sr. Eugenia Bonetti & Anna Pozzi. Ed. Rizzoli, December 2011
- Stop Trafficking in Human Beings: Together It's Possible, *proceedings of the international conference, "21<sup>st</sup> Century Slavery: The Human Rights Dimension of Trafficking in Human Beings."* Rome, May 2002
- Building a Network: A Prophetic Role of Women Religious in the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons, *Proceeding of an International Seminar in Rome for Women Religious: Rome, October 2007*
- Slaves No More, Casa Rut, the Courage of a Community, published in Italian and English, by Sr. Rita Giaretta. Edizioni Marlin, 2009
- Behind Bars (Dietro le Sbarre): Ten Years of the Ministry of Women Religious at the Centre of Identification and Expulsion of Ponte Galeria in Rome: 2003 – 2013. Published in Italian and English, USMI and Slaves No More ONLUS, 2013
- Trafficking in Women and Children: It is a Crime Against Humanity, a handbook for schools in Nigeria, by Sr. Patricia Ebegbulem, published by COSUDOW & ANAHT, Nigeria

### PAPERS

- *Dieci Anni di Lavoro in Rete (10 Years of Working in Network)*, published by USMI Counter-Trafficking Office, October 2010
- *"No More Slaves, but Brothers,"* Message from Pope Francis for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Day of Peace, 1 January 2015
- *Slaves No More: The Strength of Networking in Counter-Trafficking: Awareness Paper*. USMI & Slaves No More ONLUS, April 2015
- *Reintegration: Facilitating Resettlement in Host Countries or Countries of Origin*, Conference on Combating Human Trafficking Through Leveraging Catholic Networks and NGOs, Palazzo San Callisto, Vatican City, 12 May 2012
- *Women Helping Women: The Italian Experience of Women Religious in Combating Human Trafficking and Modern-Day Slavery*, delivered at the UN/Geneva, September 2014
- *Fighting Against Trafficking in Human Beings: A Joint Effort*, from and evening debate at Women Helping Women in Counter-Trafficking in Persons, Brussels, Belgium, 26 November 2014
- *Trafficking in Human Beings: Addressing Root Causes of Modern Forms of Slavery*, Brussels, Belgium, 27 November 2014





## **PROJECT FOR SOCIAL-LABOR REINTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The voluntary assisted Project for Social-Labor Reintegration consists of furnishing assistance to immigrant trafficking victims who desire a voluntary and immediate return to their country of origin. The project – which covers the cost of travel, vocational/educational training, logistical and financial assistance – ensures that the process of return is carried out with respect to the dignity of the person and the security concerns of the migrant.

Additional elements of the program include:

- Designation and assessment of the case
- Accompanying the person with financial, logistical, emotional assistance
- Design of an individual project of social-labor reintegration in the country of origin (which takes account of the capacity and expectations of the migrant)
- Guidance and support for the achievement of the individual project
- Research of contact with the family and reconstruction of family ties

These programs of assisted return are conducted on an individual basis and are always in response to a voluntary request from the immigrant trafficking victim.

The project is managed and supported by the association **Slaves No More ONLUS**, presided by Consolata Missionary Sr. Eugenia Bonetti, in collaboration with Caritas Italiana. It is financed by the Italian Bishops Conference (CEI), with the subsidies of 8x1000 (EXPLAIN THIS). Organizers are currently investigating other funding sources, such as private donors. Sr. Monika Chikwe, of the Hospital Sisters of Mercy, is the director of this project. Both Sr. Eugenia and Sr. Monika live and work in Rome.

### **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:**

1. Encourage and support the social-labor reintegration in Nigeria of women victims of trafficking hosted in Italy in shelters who voluntarily desire to return to their homeland.
2. Encourage and support the social-labor reintegration in Nigeria of women victims of trafficking expelled from Italian territory and repatriated through the Centers of Identification and Expulsion (CIE). This group of trafficking victims must accept to comply with the Project before forced repatriation in Nigeria.
3. Conduct awareness and sensitization campaigns in Nigerian and Italy with the aim of preventing the phenomenon of trafficking for the purposes of labor and sexual exploitation and to create a significant understanding of the phenomenon, including in civil and religious institutions for the purposes of combatting it more effectively.

## **BENEFICIARIES**

### **Direct:**

- Nigerian women trafficking victims who freely express the desire to be assisted in their return to their homeland (voluntary or forced), identified through a process of pre-selection and training managed by the association Slaves No More ONLUS
- Nigerian women who are particularly vulnerable and potential victims of trafficking

### **Indirect:**

- Members of the Italian and Nigerian ecclesial communities who will be informed and sensitized to the phenomenon of human trafficking for the purposes of sexual and labor exploitation.

Projects will not be standardized, but assigned only in collaboration with the beneficiary, in accordance with her profile, her necessities, requirements, dreams and needs. Every micro-project will have a specific budget for a maximum amount agreed to by the relevant parties.

An effective process of pre-selection and accompaniment in Italy is fundamental, technically-based in objective criteria (nationality, legal status...), but above all subjective (determination of desire to return to their homeland, personal history, training...).

This project is achieved in collaboration with religious sisters and associations which operate on the ground in Nigeria, particularly the *Committee For the Support of the Dignity of Women* (COSUDOW), and the Nigerian Conference of Women Religious, operating in Lagos and Benin City. Utilizing its extensive network of collaborations and knowledge of the local context, these associations manage all the processes of the social-labor reintegration.

In the first phase, this will be a pilot project for a minimum number of beneficiaries, for evaluating and then possibly extending it to larger numbers with this modality, building good practices to eventually replicate in other contexts.

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