



International Solidarity Reflection

School Sisters of Notre Dame

Shalem

Human Trafficking

July 2020

Introduction

The United Nations designated July 30 as the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons to “raise awareness of the situation of victims of human trafficking and for the promotion and protection of their rights.” As challenging as this is ordinarily, it is that much more difficult during a global pandemic. While all families and communities have been affected in some way, those whose lives are controlled by another, all-too-often cannot self-isolate, social distance, or seek out needed medical attention or other assistance. In addition, the hardships and isolation that accompany the pandemic have led to new opportunities for exploitation by those who seek profit at the expense of human life and dignity. Now more than ever, it is imperative we recognize that we all have a role to play in helping protect the vulnerable from those who seek to do them harm.

Call to Prayer

Loving and compassionate God, we come before you in prayer unable to comprehend the horror endured by our sisters and brothers who are exploited and abused for greed and profit. Our hearts are saddened and our spirits angry that their dignity and rights are taken through threats, force, fraud, and coercion. We cry out against the degrading practice of human trafficking and the new ways it is manifest during these days of our global pandemic. Give us the wisdom and courage to stand up against the evil that makes it possible to buy and sell people for profit, to recognize and act upon the things we can do to address this system of exploitation, and to stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in need. With the intercession of St. Josephine Bakhita, we ask this prayer in Jesus name. Amen.
(adapted from Prayer for An End to Human Trafficking by Sr. Gen Cassani, SSND)

Experience

Furloughed low wage workers, desperate to feed and care for their families, accept very high interest loans and/or employment from people they normally wouldn't, resulting in exploitation, trafficking, and debt bondage.

Border closures coupled with the suspension of legal proceedings have left migrants extremely vulnerable and victims of trafficking with limited options for assistance. The World Food Program was forced to slash its food distribution programs by up to 50 percent in trafficking hot spots including conflict-stricken Yemen and refugee camps in Uganda.

The demand for and supply of on-line pornography has jumped substantially, met increasingly through sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. With over 1.5 billion children spending less time in the classroom and many of them spending more time on-line, the result has been more exposure to violence and exploitation at home and on-line. One NGO indicated they have received new reports of child sex trafficking and abuse *every day* their country was in lock down.

The global pandemic has “magnified and worsened the injustices and vulnerabilities of millions of people around the world,” observed Sr. Gabriella Bottani, smc, the coordinator of the USIG anti-trafficking network TalithaKum. In her May 12 report on COVID-19 and human trafficking, Sr. Gabriella noted that the loss of jobs and the increase in the cost of essential goods has resulted in greater hunger, housing insecurity, debt, and limited mobility, leaving more people vulnerable and ripe for exploitation.

Reflection

Take time to consider how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted human trafficking in your part of the world. Is it obvious or more obscure? Why do you think that is?

Choose one element of our SSND directional statement, *Love Gives Everything*, and consider how it impacts your view of the issues raised in this reflection.

Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si'* that the world is facing two interrelated, not separate, crises involving the exploitation of people and planet. Do you see a relationship between human trafficking and the exploitation of Earth? Would taking better care of the planet lead to less human trafficking? Why? How?

Action

Earlier this year, Pope Francis called on internet-based companies to be vigilant about keeping human traffickers from using electronic communications to entrap victims. He said education is needed on the “healthy” use of modern technology and “suppliers of such electronic services must be held to their responsibilities.” U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking has great resources about this concern and opportunities for taking action profiled in this newsletter <https://bit.ly/3eBEE6R>, and their website at <https://www.sistersagainstrafficking.org/>. Learn more, let your voice be heard!

TalithaKum (the USIG International Network Against Trafficking in Persons) and their more than 50 affiliated networks throughout the world have a variety of resources for education, reflection, and action. Go to <https://www.talithakum.info/en/members>

Do more to care for creation. Consider supporting the Global Catholic Climate Movement with prayer and other actions.

Closing Prayer

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.

We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace. (*excerpts from A Prayer for our Earth, Laudato Si'*)