

## Prayer Marathon to End Human Trafficking: Feb 8, 2022

JPIC Department

Response prayer: by Gen Cassani, SSND



### Reader:

Today, February 8<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate the Feast Day of St. Josephine Bakhita, former slave, and the patron saint of victims of modern slavery and human trafficking. February 8<sup>th</sup> is also the *World Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking*. This year's prayer day theme is: *The Power of Care - Women, Economy, Human Trafficking*.

Trafficking is one of the deepest wounds inflicted by the current economic system where profit-making and the "bottom-line" trump human rights and economic justice. The COVID pandemic has increased the "business" of human trafficking. Many of the world's people have become unemployed or displaced by the virus and are in search of a sustainable livelihood for themselves and their families. Human traffickers prowl the spaces of human vulnerability. While promising jobs, food, decent living conditions to desperate people, traffickers easily entrap, extort, and exploit those who are most vulnerable today, especially women and girls.

### **Pause and pray for victims and perpetrators of human exploitation and trafficking**

#### **Response:**

O GOD, our words cannot express  
what our minds can barely comprehend  
and our hearts feel  
when we hear of children and adults deceived  
and transported to unknown places  
for purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor  
because of human greed.

### Reader:

As has been widely reported, the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in millions more children spending substantial amounts of time online for education and social interactions. The presence of countless children active online, has made it easier for traffickers to contact victims. The U.S. based Center for Missing and Exploited Children reported a 400% increase in reports of online child abuse and exploitation during the first year of the pandemic. Using, coercion and threat, online child traffickers persuade children to send photographs of themselves and these are uploaded or sold on the global internet. US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking is actively addressing, with other coalitions, this egregious crime against children. Among the efforts that are gaining momentum are advocacy around more vigilant oversight of potential exploitation by online platforms and the elimination of blanket immunity that protect internet companies from victim-led litigation.

### **Pause and pray for victims and perpetrators of child online exploitation and trafficking**

#### **Response:**

Our hearts are saddened and our spirits angry  
that their dignity and rights are being transgressed  
through threats, deception, and force.

**Reader:**

In Haiti, many parents face the difficult decision of sending their children to our families as domestic helpers, in the hope that their chances for survival and education might increase. This practice is known as *restavek* coming from the French words, *rester and avec*- “to stay with.”

Unfortunately, once in domestic labor, Haitian children rarely experience that for which their parents had hoped. All too often, however, these children end up being abused physically, sexually, and psychologically.

One recent estimate suggested that one in four Haitian children between the ages of 5 and 17 live apart from their parents, and that roughly half of these children end up trapped in domestic servitude. IT is estimated that as many as 250,000 Haitian children currently live in *restavek*. Bringing an end to this practice and ensuring that Haitian children experience their full rights, including the right to live in a family and to live in security is a focus of the SSND-Beyond Borders partnership in Haiti.

**Pause and pray for the SSND-beyond Borders Partnership and for the success of its' efforts to end Child Domestic Trafficking in Haiti.**

**Response:**

We cry out against the degrading practice

of child domestic labor trafficking  
and pray for it to end.



**Reader:**

In his reflections on the Feast of St. Josephine Bakhita, Pope Francis said: “I extend my message to all people of good will who pray, engage, study, and reflect on the fight against human trafficking; and especially to those—like St. Josephine Bakhita, whom we celebrate today—who have experienced the tragedy of human trafficking in their own lives. The Covid pandemic has exacerbated and worsened the conditions of labor exploitation. An economy without human trafficking is an economy with market rules that promote justice, not exclusive special interests. An economy without human trafficking is an *economy of care* that offers products and services for the growth of the common good and guarantees dignified working conditions to all.

**Pause and pray for Pope Francis vision of an *economy of care* will become realized so that every human being will live with dignity, hope, and experience the fullness of their potential as well as human rights.**

**Response:**

Strengthen the fragile-spirited and broken-hearted.  
Make real your promises to fill these our sisters and  
brothers with a love that is tender and good and send  
the exploiters away empty-handed.  
Give us the wisdom and courage to stand in solidarity with them,  
that together we will find ways to the  
freedom that is your gift to all of us.

Amen