Human trafficking is a process in which persons, by force or deception, lose their freedom and become slaves.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime says human trafficking is the fastest growing means by which people are enslaved, the fastest growing international crime, and one of the largest sources of income for organized crime.

Millions of Africans are slaves both inside and outside the continent. They are used to meet a demand for cheap labour in industry, agriculture and domestic servitude. Many are forced to serve as child-soldiers, to work as prostitutes or to undertake work exposing them to life threatening dangers. Africans are still being bought and sold. The largest proportion of these latter day slaves are children and women.

The problem of trafficking in Africa is enormous. There are clearly recognised routes that encompass Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Mali, Nigeria, Togo, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger. In West Africa the majority of those trafficked are children under 18 years old.

Similar trade routes exist in Eastern Africa where, in addition to the “normal” reasons for trafficking, conflict has created the additional need for child soldiers. In the Southern part of the continent the luring of women to South Africa for the sex trade is particularly lucrative. Poverty is the main push factor for women from countries such as Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The pull factor is the false offer of well paid jobs. This lures women to South Africa where deception is replaced by coercion and the victims are trapped.

In the trafficking process the victim at every stage is losing power, while the trafficker increasingly obtains more control over the victim. The victims are forced into compliance through physical, psychological and emotional violence exercised by others to control, exploit and make money out of them. Unlike the slave-raids of the past the modern process of trafficking is dynamic, adaptable and opportunistic. It uses modern technology and communications. It exploits, deceives and takes advantage of conflicts, humanitarian disasters and the vulnerability of people in situations of crises.

In many African countries little is being done to stop human trafficking. It is only in recent times that initiatives are being taken by NGO's and Church groups to raise awareness of the issue. In some countries anti-trafficking laws have been enacted and efforts to police and prevent trafficking are beginning to be made. However, it is still true that in many cases the authorities, security forces and even families are complicit in human trafficking. Corrupt regimes, extreme poverty and war facilitate the slavery resulting from human trafficking in Africa.

Due to greed and because many are willing to use, abuse and exploit their fellow human beings for economic benefit or their own gratification, the actions of traffickers and of those who use their victims is in direct opposition to the love and values espoused in the Gospel of Luke quoted in the heading above.

Sadly it is a fact that more people are trafficked into slavery today than there were during the entire 400 years of the transatlantic slave trade. Worldwide it is estimated that between ten and thirty million people are victims of human trafficking with 900,000 people being trafficked across international borders each year. Trafficking, although illegal all over the world is found in 161 of the world’s 196 countries. It exists by exploiting the poor and vulnerable and because their is an insatiable demand.

Human trafficking is the second most profitable criminal enterprise worldwide after drug trafficking, generating US$9.5 billion each year. 80% of those trafficked are female while 50% are children. Seventy per cent of victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation.

The injustice of Human Trafficking causes unimaginable misery and suffering to those who are dehumanised, forced to become commodities that are bought, sold, used, abused and even killed.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself.” Lk.10:26

To download SMA Justice Briefings on other topics go to www.coistine.ie/resources/justice-briefings
The stories of Mokena and Akinyi, teenage Kenyan girls from a farming community, provide a typical account of how trafficking works.

On their way home from the farm, a lorry stopped beside them, asking for directions. To help they offered to show the driver the way. Deceived by the promise of a job and money they agreed to go to Nairobi where, promises forgotten, they were raped.

Mokena was given to the driver’s cousin who beat and abused her on a daily basis. She was afraid to run away and did not know where or how to seek help. Akinyi was eventually passed on to another relative of the driver. In time she contracted a sexually transmitted disease and was, as a result, thrown out by her keeper. Forced onto the street she was cared for by a prostitute and introduced to the sex trade. Mokena disappeared.

Many Africans are trafficked internally, many others are moved across borders to neighbouring countries. Lured by the promise of a better life they become trapped in a life of slavery.

According to UNICEF, 1.2 million children are trafficked annually for forced labour and sexual exploitation. In Africa among men, women and children it is children who are most likely to be trafficked.

Open Secrets
An Irish Perspective on Trafficking and Witchcraft.

Cois Tine, an SMA Justice Office project, recently published a book with the above title. It grew out of Cois Tine’s pastoral care of African Immigrants over the past ten years during which the two very different but linked issues of Human Trafficking and Witchcraft were encountered. For various reasons these issues are cloaked in secrecy and seldom spoken of openly. In order to gain a better understanding and also to find ways of responding to these complex issues more appropriately we decided to do something about it. Open Secrets is the result.

The book provides a well researched description of human trafficking, it’s causes, processes, effects, and of the violence and greed that lie at its heart. Witchcraft is examined from the perspective of its history and its different manifestations in Europe and Africa. During the colonial era and into modern times, these manifestations have intermingled and influenced each other and now they meet again in the violence of Human Trafficking. Open Secrets gives both a clear understanding of these issues and pointers towards an appropriate Christian response.

Paperback €19.10 from Easons and Veritas
E-Book format. Download from Kindle or Amazon
Price available on websites

All proceeds go to supporting the work of Cois Tine.

The Church View

“The trade in human persons constitutes a shocking offence against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights. The alarming increase in the trade in human beings is one of the pressing political, social and economic problems associated with the process of globalisation; it presents a serious threat to the security of individual nations and a question of international justice which cannot be deferred.” These words from Pope John Paul II reflect the Church teaching outlined below.

The seventh commandment: Thou shalt not steal, forbids acts or enterprises that for any reason - selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian—lead to the enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit. St. Paul directed a Christian master to treat his Christian slave “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, ... both in the flesh and in the Lord.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church Para. no. 2414

Whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their ilk are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are supreme dishonour to the Creator.

Gaudium et Spes 27

Do Something - Raise Awareness

Well done to transition year students from Beara Community school in Castletownbere Co. Cork who have embarked on a project called Join Hands to Stop Child Trafficking. The project reached the national finals of the 2012 Young Social Innovators in Dublin this May.

In a very practical way the projects seeks to raise awareness of Child Trafficking through a Child Safety Booklet. This not only gives information but is specifically aimed at helping parents communicate safety guidelines and procedures to their children.

A second element in this project was the production of a Logo similar to the fair-trade logo. The students aim to promote the use of this logo on products as a sign that they have been produced under fair working conditions and without the labour of trafficked children.