



**Africa and Europe Faith and Justice Network  
Irish Antenna**



**18<sup>th</sup> October: UN International Day  
Against People Trafficking**

## **Human Trafficking – a Challenge for Today**

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It will not be news to readers of this Newsletter in Ireland and around the globe who are working at the coalface that combating trafficking in human beings is one of the most pressing challenges facing the international community today. Despite the fact that for more than fifty years international instruments have been created to set out and regulate the rights and duties of individuals and society, human trafficking, as modern-day slavery is called, is rampant in the twenty-first century.

It has been said that more women and children were enslaved by trafficking during the 1980s alone than were sold into slavery from Africa during the four hundred years of the slave trade. No continent or country is immune. Every day, to quote Maria Grazia Giammarinaro (1), the OSCE special representative and coordinator for combating trafficking in human beings, “men, women, and children around the world are stripped of their basic rights and trafficked as sex workers, forced labourers, involuntary servants, or for their organs”.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that “human trafficking, fed by poverty and corruption and facilitated by organised crime, victimises more than 20 million people globally”. The trade is said to generate from US\$5 – 7 billion a year.

### **Who are the traffickers?**

Both women and men are involved in this nefarious trade at various stages of the operation. Often the victims’ original contact - the person who gains their trust and makes the attractive offer of gainful employment elsewhere, does not know what their final destination may be. Traffickers can be part of organised crime gangs, small criminal networks, or individuals who have made themselves family friends and confidants, and even family members.

Countries are designated as places of origin, destination or transit. But people can also be trafficked within a country. A country can be both a transit and destination one. Ireland is both, and there is also evidence that at least one Irish woman has been trafficked to Europe making it also a source country (2).

### **How can we know the facts?**

It is possible to get an idea of the extent of trafficking in any country from the US State Department’s annual Trafficking in Persons Report (3) which aims to give “a clear and honest assessment of where all of us are making progress on our commitments and where we are either standing still or even sliding backwards.”, to quote Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Countries are given Tier placements according to how they comply with the Trafficking Victims Protection

Act's (TVPA) (4) minimum standards. A look at the list of Tier placements for 2012 will show us where any country we might be interested in is placed. The UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) publishes a similar report on its website where one can also find materials and tools to help in combating human trafficking.

Navigating the Internet (5) can bring up an extraordinary amount of information from around the world seeming to indicate that the phenomenon is on the increase. Indeed, this is the view of the ILO. But it also emerges that awareness of human trafficking has also increased as well as the political will to tackle it. The two main instruments that serve as a basis for best practice with regard to human trafficking prevention, legislation and care of survivors are the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, a protocol to the Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. They can be downloaded from the Web together with a list of countries that have signed and ratified them.

A growing number of countries have legislation, action plans and, less commonly, schemes for victim assistance but, overall, the response is not commensurate with the magnitude of the problem. Nor is there yet a strong enough realisation on the part of governments that they need to tackle the root causes contributing to trafficking, such as lack of job opportunities for women, discrimination, patriarchy and marginalisation of whole communities. But poverty remains the first root cause and it is safe to say that people from the poorest countries on all continents where missionaries, lay and religious, work are the most vulnerable.

### **How do we face up to the global issue of human trafficking?**

We act locally and share our knowledge and resources globally. People of different persuasions worldwide, committed to upholding the rights of every individual, have formed groups to combat this crime and collaborate with one another. People of faith are motivated also by their sense of the inherent sacredness of the human person made in the image and likeness of God.

In Ireland, one such organisation whose work might be of interest to missionaries working abroad, is APT (Act to Prevent Trafficking), a group of women and men religious, formed in 2006 to do what its name suggests. Our vision is *“of a world in which all persons are respected, valued and given the dignity which is theirs by right; a world where no one seeks to exploit or to enslave another for sexual gratification or financial gain”*.

APT concentrates on trafficking for sexual exploitation and takes a three-pronged approach to the issue:

- Awareness-raising
- Networking nationally and internationally
- Lobbying for legislation.

We are also tackling the demand aspect of sex trafficking by supporting the TORL (Turn Off the Red Light) campaign for the criminalisation of the buyers of sexual services. Several APT members also work with Ruhama, the Dublin-based organisation that provides a service to women involved in prostitution, women who are exiting prostitution, and women who are victims of sex trafficking. The latter, who may wish to remain in Ireland, are helped to re-integrate into society.

When APT was formed there was little awareness of the problem in Irish society or the Irish church, and no legislation. A campaign of visiting schools, parish and community group to speak about human trafficking has led to increased awareness throughout the country. The Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008 was passed thanks, in some measure, to pressure from APT who made a presentation to TDs and Senators in the Dáil, met with the Minister for Justice and supported lobbying by other groups.

Links and cooperation with groups working in sending countries have been strengthened through members' international networks. Some sending and receiving countries have established close links so that victims of trafficking who are deported may be helped on their return. Nigeria and Italy are examples of close collaboration between Conferences of Women Religious.

There is much to do to shift the tide of public sentiment and redefine the political, social and spiritual landscape of nations. But it is our Christian faith, responding to this crime against humanity with an untiring quest for justice, that will ultimately crush trafficking.

#### Notes

- (1) <http://www.ungift.org/knowledgehub/en/stories/april2011/interview-with-maria-grazia-giammarinaro.html>
- (2) <http://www.thejournal.ie/readme/human-trafficking-sex-ireland-slavery-494110-Jun2012/>
- (3) <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2012/>
- (4) <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2009/123132.htm>
- (5) <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/publications.html>  
<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/index.html>  
<http://www.stophetraffik.org/>  
<http://www.antislavery.org/english/>