

STOP THE VIOLENCE

Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Foundation Decries Human Trafficking of Women as Modern-Day Slavery

New York, NY-March 8, 2010-Human trafficking is among the most pressing forms of violence against women today. Trafficking for sex and labor is fast becoming the third largest criminal industry in the world. In the US, the number of trafficking victims, both male and female, is estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands. Reports indicate that worldwide there are up to 27 million people who have been lured into trafficking situations by the promise of a good job in another country; a false marriage proposal that turns into bondage; sale by parents or a husband; or kidnapping. Poverty and limited education increase an individuals' vulnerability.

"Trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery. It violates an individual's most basic human right-freedom," said Linda Christian, Executive Director of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Foundation in New York City. "Traffickers use psychological and physical coercion, and debt bondage to condition their victims. Confinement, starvation, gang rape, forced drug abuse, beatings, and threats of revealing their victims' activities to their families are among the methods to control," she said.

The Franciscan Sisters of the Poor participate in an international network against human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Through their Miriam Project in Padua, Italy, they offer immediate shelter and safety to women victims of kidnapping for prostitution. Sometimes other organizations are reluctant to help these women because they are illegal or have no documents. The Sisters provide support and counsel as the women begin the difficult journey to rediscover their dignity and self-esteem.

"Often the women must deal with serious physical and psychological health risks, the result of life on the streets over a prolonged period of time," said the Sisters. "Sometimes victims suffer Traumatic Bonding, a form of coercive control which results in the victim experiencing not only fear but gratitude for being alive. They may also experience Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. We must first gain their trust; then comes medical assistance; access to legal support; assistance with police reports; and whatever it takes to help these women transition from a life on the streets to life in a community," the Sisters said.

Violence against women exists in all cultures and classes, in every region and every country. The United Nations reports that up to 70 percent of women experience some form of sexual, physical or emotional assault during their lifetime. "The Franciscan Sisters Foundation applauds the strides that have been made in the pursuit of gender equality for women since the *United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women* in 1995.

However, much remains to be done. Until violence against women, by a husband, a boyfriend, a family member, or trafficker is eradicated, continued progress will be impeded. Voices must be raised against sexual exploitation and the violation of human dignity, laws must be strengthened, and women everywhere must be made aware of their legal rights,” said Linda Christian.

How to Help:

In the US, trafficking victims fall into three groups

- Minors under 18 years of age who are involved in commercial sex
- Those who are 18 or older and involved in commercial sex through force or deception
- Children and adults forced to perform labor or services in conditions of servitude or bondage, or through coercion, fraud or force.

If you think you know of a victim of human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1-888-3737-888. This hotline will help you identify resources in your community to address the situation.

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) enables trafficking victims who are non-US citizens to receive Federally-funded benefits and services: food, healthcare, and employment assistance to the same extent as refugees.
- There is Federal legislation: The Trafficking in Persons Act (TVPA), but not all states have laws against this crime. You can be a catalyst for change, a voice for those who have no voice.

For more information on the Miriam Project and other programs of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor for victimized women throughout the world, please contact the office of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Foundation: 212-818-1987, or visit our website: www.franciscanfoundation.org.

An international, multi-cultural congregation, the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor work on the streets among the poorest of the poor. Through more than 25 programs in five countries, the Sisters shelter, heal, and educate. They affirm the dignity and human rights of each person, transforming lives, one life at a time.

The Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Foundation is a principle source of funding and support for the Sisters’ efforts in marginalized societies around the world.

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