

**The First Symposium of Young People against Prostitution and Human
Trafficking - The Greatest Violence against Human Beings
15th-16th November, 2015
Casina Pio IV, Vatican City, Rome**

On the initiative of and with the support and blessing of Pope Francis at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in Casina Pio IV in the Vatican City, the First Symposium of Young People against Prostitution and Human Trafficking, took place from the 15th-16th November, 2014.

The Symposium was organised by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (Mons Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo), Global Freedom Network (Antonia Stampalija and Gabriela Marino) and Vínculos En Red (Alicia Peressutti and Piero Picatto) and was mainly attended by 75 youths.

The Symposium offered a range of world-wide non-governmental organisations where youth work with the mission of preventing human trafficking. At the Symposium they discussed the most pressing issues which they are facing in their daily work. Mons Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo expressed his joy, gratitude and the need to maintain this Symposium.

Pope Francis met with the attendees and expressed his satisfaction watching so many youth who are dedicated to helping those most in need and who are voluntarily risking their lives and investing it for the benefit of others. At the end of the Symposium, the attendees compiled, signed and delivered to Pope Francis the **First International Declaration of Youth against Prostitution and Human Trafficking**. Here is a brief overview of the main emphases of exposures, most of which can be found on www.endslavery.va

Florencia Pedregosa (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/argentina.html) connected prostitution and human trafficking by observing human body as an object of consummation, and pointed out the difference of prostitution and trafficking made by victims (prostitutes and transsexuals), arguing that prostitution could not be regarded as a job. The perception of men towards human trafficking should not go in the direction of expressing masculinity by taking advantage of girls and women, visiting brothels and buying services with the use of coercion and violence, claimed **Piero Picatto** (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/masculinidad.html), who also stressed the importance of fostering responsible and selfless sexuality, based on mutual respect and self-control.

A hotbed of pimps and the centre of sexual exploitation of women in the Mexican region of Tlaxcala creates a spiral of violence which leads to the subordination and oppression of women in prostitution, which pimps recruit, employ and transported along the Mexico and the United States, as testified **Ixchel Yglesias Gonzáles Báez** (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/proxenetas.html). The alarming situation exists in Bolivia, because of lack of initiatives and projects that would: strengthen the application of law and human rights; prevent corruption; increase accountability rating; include vulnerable groups of African descent; encourage free life without gender, family and sexual violence; prevent trafficking; shatter illusions about better life and study in the cities; prevent prostitution for food, rent and education; remove the invisible chains of prostitution and false epithets of exotic and desirable women, said **Ana Paola García Villagómez** (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/ayorea.html).

A similar situation obtains in Albania, where organized crime, institutionalized violence, corruption, deep despair, dominates. There exists a mentality of rejection of good initiatives which could provide changes in the state and in the inequality of women and Roma

people (for example, women receive 35% less wages for a similar job to a man, and where is 60% of sexually selective abortion of girls), and the most vulnerable ethnic groups do not have access to education and social services (Roma parents sell children to survive hunger and poverty), said **Olivia Conroy** (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/albania.html).

Pisey Khin (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/cambodia.html) spoke about the increase of human trafficking in Cambodia, which is influenced by poverty, social and economic inequality, confiscation of land and the loss due to climate change, lack of employment, education, available information about the challenges and risks of migration, where most women become victims of sexual exploitation and forced into unpaid labour by signing incomprehensible contracts, and because of the shame, do not ask family for help. The brutal practice of female genital mutilation is a potential risk of development in Cape Verde, where many immigrants from African territories arrive and who still implement this brutal practice. This is also a violence against the bodies of girls and women, and this practise is applied as a ritual without prior notice or explanation, in the unhygienic way, on which favour goes groundless stereotypes and beliefs. More research on this subject by, **Cádi Sano** (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/fgm.html).

We learned of the hardships of prison life, as endured by Sinai prisoners, of whom 95% are Eritreans, fleeing the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. Many end up illegally paying human smugglers or guides to find a way out of the country. Most of them get kidnapped and physically and mentally abused and tortured waiting for relatives to pay extortionately high ransoms, leading to recent human trafficking across the Mediterranean Sea, as testified **Vanessa Berhe** (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/sinai.html).

Elvis Popaj (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/community.html) explained how to help victims of human trafficking through mobile teams, and he also explained the importance of identifying dysfunctional families and individuals who are potential victims (minors, poorly educated or uneducated, unemployed, discriminated and socially excluded people and ethnic groups, such as Roma women and members of the Egyptian community). He also shared information on ways to help prevent their exploitation.

Paulina Konarska (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/poland.html) presented an overview of the decade of work done by the organization PoMOC which is run by nuns, providing adequate assistance to abused women, victims of violence and victims of trafficking, finding them on the streets.

Alejandra Scelles Torres (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/espania.html) presented the work of the Foundation Scelles, within which is the international research centre for sexual exploitation (CRIDES), which estimates that in Spain 90% of prostitutes are trafficked, mostly student girls. It is necessary to do something in terms of a high tolerance of prostitution in the media, which tends to promote and normalize the commercialism of women's bodies. It is also necessary to promote initiatives and education for peace and equality between men and women in society. The victim of labour and sexual exploitation, **M. C. M.** from Mexico, a member of the Sin Trata, testified about the vulnerability that exists because of the exploitation as a victim of a corrupt state system that does not provide adequate social care for children over twelve years.

The victim of child prostitution in Mexico, **K. J.** (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/circulo.html) presented personal testimony of breaking free from the vicious cycle of trafficking. Having recovered, K.J. now helps victims and carried out a campaign which aims to influence and change laws that are supposed to help victims.

As the past cannot be erased nor can the future be written, survivors are faced with a number of challenges, as evidenced by **Madai Morales Albino** (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/empoderamiento.html) who through the work in foundation, aims to provide education, care and training, and to strengthen and support the victims.

Nilinuri Toppo (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/india.html) stressed the importance of cooperation with the police in the rescue of victims of trafficking. Nilinuri shared her brother's experience as the victim of forced labour. She spoke of the alarming situation in India, where 200 women fall into prostitution daily, 80% them forced. She also spoke about the appalling working conditions in brothels where women are forced to meet up to 18 clients daily.

Robert Colvin (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/rehabilitation.html) spoke about his experiences cooperating with the international human rights agencies in Cebu, the Philippines. He presented the experience of working with child victims of commercial sexual trafficking and described the model of working on cases. He testified that without love he could not do this job, because love does not only sees systems that need to be repaired, even more love sees people to care. After all, the trafficked persons and traders need care and a lot of love.

Sr Stanka Orsolc spoke about the rehabilitation of victims of trafficking from a spiritual point of view, (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/spiritual.html). Sr. Stanka has worked with female victims of trafficking in association with the Medaille Trust in London, and realized that every victim has the need for freedom, salvation, happiness and love. She spoke of the importance of making every victim see that these rights are attainable because victims have to face the complex stages of their own lives. The program of providing spiritual help will uplift their weary spirits because they believe God, who created them, miraculously saved them and good people- angels- helped them see out of the dark reality to a happier tomorrow.

Sr Eugenia Bonetti highlighted the prophetic role of the 250 affiliated Italian nuns working in shelters for victims of trafficking. Through their work, they contribute to the promotion of the dignity of every woman created in the image of God, whose role in the world, society, the Church and the media must be viewed more than as objects. The chains of slavery continue to exist because many people by remain silent and indifferent.

Caritas in Cambodia carried out a variety of programs empowering youth, the most vulnerable groups in human trafficking, to facilitate their later employment and prevent illegal migration, said **Sary Phirum** (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/asia.html).

Anna Bartošová (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/slovakia.html) presented the initiatives implemented by Caritas in Slovakia (Gift box campaigns, film festival with movies and documentaries about the problem of human trafficking and the animated film The two girls), which has so far rescued 52 victims and so enabled them to live dignified lives.

Patrick Gage, a descendant of Curtis L. Carlson, founder of the leading business brand passenger Carlson's Wagolit Travel, (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/hotels.html) presented their strategy to combat human trafficking and offered suggestions for the entire hospitality sector as follows: adopt a code of ethics and business conduct against trafficking in persons; establish a Coalition of Hotels against trafficking; promote the SOS hotline for victims of trafficking; revise supply chains for hotels and stressed the importance of taking responsibility for a system the hospitality sector has built and demanded because the hotels are demeaned by trafficking, sexual exploitation and debt bondage.

Ruth Kilcullen (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/mecpaths.html) spoke about nuns, experts and

volunteers who conducted a training program for staff in 100 Irish hotels about the problem of human trafficking of children for sexual exploitation.

A nurse from the US N. K. (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/labor.html) testified about her own experiences of labour exploitation in the United States. She also spoke about Bethany Christian Services who took care of her, and encouraged the generation of funds to help the victims in education and in employment, and so on that way release the walls of shame of victims.

Luísa Sousa Barradas (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/caboverde.html) spoke about child labour in Cape Verde, where 40% of the population are children and adolescents, and 53% of these children is threatened working in a variety of activities that are detrimental to their physical and mental health, and social and moral development, and stressed that it is necessary to protect children, give scholarships for education of poor children, fined and sentenced to prison to punish exploiters of child labour, ensure the SOS villages accommodation for abandoned children.

Andra Georgeta Șerban (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/victims.html) presented the work and strategy for combating trafficking in persons in the State of Romania. Andra spoke of the intervention centre in Cluj for abused children, which ensures the implementation of assistance and strategies to protect children, carries out prevention campaigns at all levels of society, and establishes a mentoring network for young people and for the victims.

Vaughan Bagley (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/village.html) spoke about cross-sectoral collaboration and basic advocacy in the fight against human trafficking and sexual exploitation of children conducted by ICMEC who estimated that each year, 2 million children who are victims of pornography, trafficking and sexual exploitation. The establishment of the *Financial Coalition against Child Pornography*, the Working Group on the Digital Economy and the *Global Health Coalition* are hoping to find new methods of combating trafficking in persons in order to change the conceptualization of human trafficking and the way the world responds to this problem.

Winnie Mutevu (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/kenya.html) presented the work of a network of youth group named YOUNG@HAART in the fight against human trafficking in Kenya, where forced labour and sexual exploitation of trafficked women from the Arab countries, Europe and the United States are present, and where women are mainly infected with HIV.

Austelino Dias Tavares (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/gender_violence.html) presented the project “Youth Against Gender Violence” conducted with a group of young educators and trainers in Praia. Through this initiative, young people are taught to become more considerate of their sexuality, masculinity and women’s bodies. Through stronger awareness-raising, it is intended that there will be a reduction in human trafficking, through greater public advocacy and speech on the issue at different levels in society.

Mariana Ruenes (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/juventud.html) with a group of young people, aims to immunize young people in the fight against trafficking in human beings. Mariana spoke of the widespread violence, kidnapping, prostitution occurring in Mexico, where the majority of juvenile victims do not understand the situation in which they find themselves as trafficking in persons is not recognised as a social problem.

Joseph Loh Chih-Ko (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/taiwan.html) spoke about the prevention of human trafficking in Taiwan among young people. Information seminars are held in the parishes, universities and campsites speaking about the dangers of working in the open sea and about

the functioning of the Good Shepherd shelter where care for 190 victims of sexual and labour exploitation was ensured.

Natália Cordeiro Guimarães (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/masculinity.html) spoke about the connection between the sexual market and masculinity. She explored the PAPA institute which assists in paternal support of youth and adolescents; discusses and reflects about behaviour of men; and implements projects aimed at combating trafficking and sexual exploitation in Brazil, especially among workers in 844 ports. She also spoke of the efforts at mobilization the young men to stop sexual violence during the World Cup.

Mary Anne Balthazar (http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/publications/youth_symposium_2014/sabah.html) presented the problems in Malaysia, where although there is economic growth, low unemployment and high demand for cheap and uneducated labour force on the plantations, there exists forced prostitution in households in addition to discrimination of children of migrants. Mary Anne spoke of the hopes to provide better services to victims of trafficking who have complex needs. She also spoke of the challenges of partnership with government, agencies, embassies, Church, Churches organisations and associations, corporations and individuals.

Although influenced by the political situations, corruption, social problems, social challenges, moral irresponsibility, unethical behaviour, ineffective legal systems and economic crises, young people at this Symposium had the courage, knowledge, experience and strength to raise their voices, express their clear position against a system that allows people fall into prostitution and any other form of slavery and rise as active human rights defenders, promoters of the protection of fundamental human rights, as prompted by Pope Francis at the World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro in 2013. Pope Francis encouraged the young people to raise their voices in their local dioceses so as to be heard in the Church. Pope Francis suggested the Church should go out to into the street, and that the young people should resist all efforts to prevent their spreading of the Good News.

Initially, Pope Francis asked Mons. Sorondo to start investigating trafficking in persons and human organs as part of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and Social Sciences, which resulted in the organisation of a series of important, influential and recognized events internationally, of which this Symposium is one.

The Symposium initiated a number of other events at both global and national levels, including the formation of an anti-slavery youth group. The youth present made a commitment to remain in solidarity with the victims of human trafficking and to transmit a clear message to the world against slavery. They are committed to inviting all young people to break the cultural paradigm that riveted people in various forms of exploitation and to link with and empower vulnerable groups in society and to protect them from prostitution and trafficking networks.

This Article was firstly published in the Croatian language in the Croatian Magazine *New Presence – Review for Intellectual and Spiritual Questions*, in July 2015. It can be found at the following address: http://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=clanak&id_clanak_jezik=209852.

Sr. Stanka Oršolić is a member of the Congregation of Notre Dame Sisters from Zagreb and in this Symposium she participated as a member of RENATE (Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation).