

## RENATE at Katholikentag in Leipzig:

“Give a voice to the poor and oppressed”.

Stop human trafficking!

Prepared by Sr. Andrea Tillmanns.



On Wednesday, the 25th May 2016 in Leipzig, the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK) inaugurated the 100<sup>th</sup> Katholikentag or Catholic Day. This popular festival brought together Catholics, as well as people of other religious traditions, in dialogue with political, cultural and business leaders.

More than 1000 exhibitions, performances and talks took place and more than 40.000 people participated, over the five days of the festival.

RENATE was present with an information stand and organized a public discussion, with a view to sharing information about the work of RENATE and awareness raising about human trafficking.

### Leipzig, Katholikentag and Pope Francis

Leipzig sits in the heart of the former GDR, the most secular region of Western Europe and was a curious choice for German Catholics to celebrate the anniversary of their main public event. In fact, while Catholics represent only 4% and Protestants 10% of the regional population, 80% of locals identify themselves as having no religious affiliation.

The fundamental religious and basic human questions are at the heart of the Congress motto: "Behold the man," a phrase taken from the words of Pontius Pilate in the Passion of the Christ: "Ecce Homo". Bearing the motto in mind, respect for human dignity and humanity in modern times was the main focus point of the event.

Pope Francis sent a video message. He said this theme shows us that it's not exterior success that counts in life, but rather the ability to stop, to look and to be attentive to the needs of others. Through contemplation and prayer, the Pope said, we can draw closer to God and see that as he shows love and mercy to us, so we are called to be merciful to each other. So often, he noted, we see people ill-treated and deprived of their dignity – the elderly, the sick, the unemployed and the refugees. Pope Francis concluded his message with a blessing for participants, urging them to find more time in their lives to give a voice to the poor and the oppressed.



### **Awareness-raising and educational programs**

Give a voice to the poor and the oppressed, the victims of human trafficking, the women forced into prostitution, this is the mission of RENATE and this was also the reason for the presence in Leipzig.

*"We have had really interesting and encouraging meetings. But many discussions have also shown that there is still a lot of work to be done. We need good educational programmes and awareness-raising activities. There is a great lack of information and formation. I talked to a 17 year old boy, who declared he was unfamiliar with the term human trafficking. At the end of our conversation, he asked me to contact his teachers and to come to give a talk about human trafficking at his school. Of course, I will!"* Dagmar Plum, a German religious member of RENATE, about her time at the RENATE-stand.

*"There was also a lot of interest in Josephine Bakhita, her life and fight against slavery",* added Gabriella Legradi, Hungarian religious and also member of RENATE. *"We promoted the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, her feast day and also the International day of prayer and awareness against human trafficking. We invited everybody to join in prayer. The life of Josephine Bakhita can inspire us to step up our actions on ending this crime."*

### **"Slaves no more, but brothers and sisters"**

On Friday, the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, RENATE's presence at the information stand was supported by a public presentation, the motto of which was **"Slaves no more, but brothers and sisters,"** (Pope Francis, in a message for World Peace Day 2015).

Pope Francis has made the defense of migrants and workers a core issue of his papacy. *"All of us are called (by God) to be free, all are called to be sons and daughters, and each, according to his or her own responsibilities, is called to combat modern forms of enslavement. From every people, culture and religion, let us join our forces,"* said the Pope. Inspired by this words, Sr. Gabriella Bottani, Talitha Kum, international network against human trafficking, Sr. Monica Chikwe, Religious Conference Italy and Sr. Mabel Mariotti, Solwodi Germany presented their work, shared their experiences and answered questions from the public.

### Global network “Talitha Kum”



Talitha Kum is the global network against human trafficking. It represents 17 regional networks, present in 70 countries and 5 continents, with 2000 Religious. *“The networks operate according to four paradigms: prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership”*, explained Sr. Gabriella Bottani. *“Being a global network allows us to act in solidarity worldwide.”*

In her presentation, Sr. Gabriella Bottani described the difficulties faced in the fight against human trafficking. Human trafficking occurs in many guises: sexual exploitation, forced labor, forced marriage, begging, surrogate motherhood, transplantation of organs ... *“Human trafficking is a phenomenon – like a chameleon – very complicated to recognize and identify.”*

She shared that networking is always a challenge. There is always a tendency to individualism and egotism. *“We must create the competences of collaboration.... We must weave nets of confidence, dignity and freedom.....Living networks created for freedom show us the way to quit the borders of our small world.”*

For Sr. Gabriella, there is no alternative: *“The violence, the complexity and the graveness of this problem necessitates networking and mutual support.”*

### Human trafficking and prostitution in Germany



Sr. Mabel Mariotti spoke about human trafficking in Germany. Mabel works in Berlin, Germany for Solwodi, an organization for foreign women and girls in distress or who are victims of human trafficking and forced prostitution, domestic violence or forced marriages. She stressed that statistics never

showed the true situation. The estimated number of unknown cases is very big, because many victims don't testify, they are afraid for themselves and their families. Mabel told the story of a young Nigerian woman who was psychologically manipulated with voodoo rites, frightening her into staying in the prostitution.

Mabel supports a modification of the German law about prostitution. *"The actual law did not work. Most women in prostitution are foreign women. They don't understand German and they don't know their social rights. Working contracts or social assurance – these are not the reality for these women. I prefer the Swedish model, ban prostitution. Societies where women and men are equal, cannot accept prostitution."*

In Mabel's view, the abolition of prostitution and the penalization of the clients is only one part of the fight for more justice. The other consists in education and formation programmes for the women – to support them to have another professional perspective, especially also in their own countries.

*"But the Swedish model and its effects are encouraging. At the beginning, in Sweden, the people were very critical and against this law. Now public opinion about prostitution has changed and a significant majority of the population (about 80%) support this law against prostitution."*

In Germany, Solwodi initiated a petition for the prohibition of buying sexual services. Nearly 30.000 persons signed.

### Italian network "Slaves no more"

Sr. Monique Chikwe concluded the RENATE presentations about human trafficking. She explained where the migrants in Italy come from, what routes they travel and why they leave their home countries. *"They believe in false promises. It is easy to manipulate them because they are poor, without perspective in their own countries. They are vulnerable; they easily become victims of traffickers. On arrival in Europe, the traffickers steal their documents and exploit them in forced labor or in prostitution etc."* Human trafficking is a well organised, big business, with a lot of money.



Finally Sr. Monica presented the Italian network "Slaves no more" (<http://www.slavesnomore.it/english/>), an association combating violence against women and trafficking in human beings for labor and sexual exploitation. *"Through this association,"* explained Monica, *"we would like to intervene in a more effective way in order to prevent and oppose the violence against women and to combat the phenomenon of trade. We work on the internet with other groups, entities and associations both in Italy and abroad. This is the reason why an English title was chosen for our organisation, especially because we need*

*to work at an international level. The issue of human trafficking is a phenomenon that involves countries that serve as countries of origin, transit or destination, with which we would like to intensify contacts and collaboration."*

The Association has among its main objectives the formation, information, prevention, liberation and the promotion of women who have been marginalised or victims of situations that deprive them of their dignity or legal status. It also offers support and help in the reintegration of victims, both socially and occupationally, through individual projects both in Italy and in the countries of origin of the immigrant women.

### **For a world of brothers and sisters**

After 5 days at Katholikentag in Leipzig, the message is clear: Human trafficking is a deplorable crime. Peoples' rights and freedoms are taken away. Most of the victims suffer physical or sexual violence. Women and children are particularly vulnerable. And the criminals responsible are making billions of euros in profits with little chance of being prosecuted for their actions. Governments, employers and consumers need to send a clear signal that trafficking will not be tolerated. For this purpose, all networks and associations must work – for a world of brothers and sisters, without slaves.

Adapted by Anne Kelleher, RENATE Communications Person.