



RENATE 2nd European Assembly, Rome 6-12 November, 2016.

“Ending Trafficking begins with US.”

As the Jubilee Year of Mercy drew to a close, 130 members of the RENATE network gathered together in Rome for their 2nd European Assembly. Representatives from the 27 member countries met for a full week, to share best practice, network, dialogue and pray.

Prayer was the fulcrum around which the work of the week rotated, with Live Streaming of Opening and Closing Liturgies available on the RENATE website. Cardinal Turkson presided at the Opening Mass, with Fathers Tadeschi, Roman Lahish CSSR, Algridas Toliatas, Luigi D’Alessandra OFM. and Monsignor Cicero presided at the Closing Mass. Each day began with morning Mass, with specific member countries leading the Liturgies on any given day.

Underpinning the theme of the Assembly, was a sound bedrock of Theological Reflections, based on Catholic Social Teaching and enunciated by Dr. Anna Rowlands, Deputy Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies, Durham University. Anna pushed the boundaries of our understandings as she related the challenges of daily life to the teachings and witness of the Gospel. We were humbled to hear the prophetic words of Jesus which challenged our comfort zones and encouraged us to seek faithfully to align ourselves with the marginalised, oppressed, voiceless and forgotten. Each night, we paused, reflected and prayerfully responded “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.”

From the opening Liturgy through to the final closing ceremonies, participants bonded and built connections. There were opportunities for sharing during the workshops; the Market-place events in the evenings after dinner; during the visit to the Vatican; during the excursions to the shelters and on the Loreto Pilgrimage. Each meal-time was an opportunity to create connections and strengthen the bonds of the Network.

Sister Imelda Poole, IBVM, RENATE President, welcomed participants as she recalled the history of RENATE from its origins in 2010 and the 1st Assembly in Trzebinia, Poland, September 2011 with a gathering of 75 women religious and their associates from 17 countries to the current Assembly attendance of 130 from 27 countries.



The Assembly was welcomed to Rome by Italian religious and clergy. The first guest speaker of the conference, Sister Regina Cesarato, UISME Italy, who called on all in the assembly to strive to work together to stop human trafficking. This message was endorsed by Monsignor Sorondo, Chancellor of the Vatican Pontifical Academy of Science and Social Science, when he also spoke about the importance of collaboration and cooperation.

Sister Eugenia Bonetti, mc, and Sister Gabriella Bottani, smc, of Talitha Kum, spoke of the potential to make a greater impact on preventing human trafficking, when participants collaborate across borders and work together to eradicate this horrible crime against humanity.

This call for strengthening of the network and the value of collaboration, were recurring themes running throughout the Assembly.

Ms Myria Vassiliadou, the EU International anti-trafficking co-ordinator, emphasised the Assembly theme “Human Trafficking ends with US,” when she addressed the Assembly via video. She discussed the importance of working together in order to continue the EU’s fight against the organised criminal gangs that prey on the most vulnerable in society.

The possibilities for the network to effect change was brought home to the group at the launch of the RENATE Mapping Report, when Sister Patricia Mulhall, csb, spoke about the extent of the network from the UK to the Ukraine and the enormous amount of activities and successful collaborations that are in evidence but not entirely acknowledged. Much of this work has not been documented.

Copies of the Report were given to each member present at the Assembly. It is also available on the RENATE website.

This consideration of the Religious as being self-effacing and reluctant to take credit for their pioneering and visionary work, was emphasised by Mr Luke de Pulford, from the **ARISE** Foundation in the UK and again by John Studzinski, who shared some insights as to how to be strategic in approaching benefactors who may be possible sponsors.

Another launch took place at the Assembly, that of the RENATE film “**Called to give a Voice to the Voiceless.**” directed by Sister Iva Kúšiková, ssps. This film documented the various activities undertaken by a cross-section of RENATE members. A copy of the DVD was given to each



participant.

Audience with Pope Francis, 7th November.

The highlight of the Assembly was a special audience with Pope Francis in the Vatican, on Monday 7th November.

It was a great honour for RENATE to meet him and a very special privilege for each person to shake his hand and speak with him in person.

Patricia Mulhall, csb, presented Pope Francis with a specially woven St. Brigid's Cross, from the Bridgidine Community in Kildare, Ireland. RENATE visited Kildare when attending training in Dublin in October, 2015. Sister Viktorija Šimić, scsc, from Croatia accompanied Patricia in presenting an accompanying Prayer, composed by the Bridgidine Sisters, Mary, Rita and Phil, whilst weaving the Cross. It reads as follows:

St. Brigid's Cross, Kildare, Ireland.

The rushes for this cross were gathered on the Curragh Plain, formerly known as St. Brigid's Pastures, Kildare, Ireland. The cross has endured from generation to generation, surviving great persecution and hunger.

Reflection said during the weaving process.

Each rush woven into this cross represents the members of Renate and our respective countries. It carries our hopes and dreams, our prayers and our gifts as we collaborate in working against human trafficking and exploitation in Europe and the wider world.



When we look at the interlacing at the centre of this cross and how separate rushes are woven together, we are reminded that human survival depends upon human beings of all nations seeking to embrace one another with generosity, understanding, respect and a willingness to share the goods of the earth with justice for all creation.

Holy Father, your vision and courage are an inspiration to us as we network with many national and international organisations to give hope to survivors, help transform perpetrators, bring light to the darkness and eradicate the scourge of human trafficking.

‘‘Ar scáth a chéile a mhairimid’’ – an Irish idiom which translates:

‘‘we live in the shelter of each other.’’



Weaving new life through the cross.
Blessings anew, love flowing through,
Weaving new life through the cross.

Sister Imelda Poole, IBVM, President, addressed Pope Francis on behalf of RENATE. She spoke about the various activities and initiatives underway by women Religious and their associates and co-workers across Europe, in efforts to bring an end to human trafficking. She thanked him for his gift of leadership in the church and in the world, which is a rich blessing for us. Particularly, the assembly see it as a rich blessing for the many victims of human trafficking and for all who work in this field. She concluded by affirming his stance on human as he made it a mark of his papacy to denounce this 'vile trade' in human lives. She concluded with:

*"You have brought the **love** of God; the **compassion** of God; the **joy** of God and above all the **mercy** of God to us and to the world."* (A copy of full address is available at www.renate-europe.net).



In response, Pope Francis commended the work of RENATE in raising public awareness about the extent of *"this scourge which especially affects women and children."* He praised them especially for their *"faithful witness to the Gospel of Mercy, as demonstrated in their commitment to the recovery and rehabilitation of victims."* He acknowledged the work of the RENATE Network whose members often risked their own lives to save victims from the criminals who network to traffic and exploit the vulnerable. Pope Francis Assured the assembly of his prayers and encouraged the group to keep our eyes focused on the importance of our work, stating, *"As you well know, one of the challenges to this work of advocacy, education and coordination is a certain indifference and even complicity, a tendency on the part of many to look the other way where powerful economic interests and networks of crime are at play."*

He concluded his remarks by expressing his confidence that the members of RENATE would contribute *"to a more effective witness to the Gospel in one of the great peripheries of society."*

Listen: <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-raise-awareness-about-scourge-of-human-trafficking>

During the Assembly, a number of presentations featured on a daily basis. All of these are available in the Members' Area on the RENATE website. Input on the 2nd European Platform was presented jointly by Mr Gazi Memaj, from **Mary Ward Loreto**, Albania and Ms Aneta Grabowska, Secretary to RENATE, Poland.

Mrs. Iana Matei, founder of **Reaching Out Romania**, shared her unwavering commitment to making a difference in the lives of young girls in Romania. She spoke about the shelter she runs and its impact for good amongst those who have been trafficked and sexually exploited.



Mr. Theo Hendrickx, pastor, former policeman and counsellor to survivors of human trafficking and their families, spoke about his work for more than 22 years as a police officer in the Netherlands.

Sister Valeria Gandini, cms, shared her experiences of working with trafficked migrants

in Sicily. Her words were echoed by Monsignor Perego, who spoke about the realities of migration in Lampedusa. Mrs. Helena Maleno Garzón gave her testimony about the harsh realities of life for women and children, struggling to avoid traffickers as they try to find safe passage across the Mediterranean on the Southern Spanish border.

The following Workshop topics were convened during the Assembly.

Voluntary Return, led by Sister Monica Chikwe, som.

Family Systems to combat Lover-Boy Problems- a Three phased model, led by Theo and Cora Hendrickx.



Prostitution, led by Kristina Mišiniienė.

New Projects in Algeciras, led by Sister Maria Luisa Puglisi, fsa.

MECPATHS- Mercy efforts to end Child Prostitution and Trafficking in the Hotel Sector, led by Sister Mary Ryan, rsm.

Prevention work at the Grassroots level and Systemic Change in Albania, led by

Mrs Ana Stakaj, MWL & Mariana Meshi, Different and Equal, Albania.

Website integration and Functionality, led by Mrs Annie Bannister, WSIE UK.

Experiences from the UN CSW 2015 Meeting, led by Sister Marjolein Bruinen, op.

How to provide Information to Young people about Trafficking (interactive), led by Sister Pilar Casas Navarro, fsa.

Safe Return- Information on the new Dutch Religious Network on Trafficking, Exploitation, Migration and Justice, led by Mrs Ivonne van de Kar.

The Nano Nagle Centre, Spišské Podhradie, Slovakia, led by Sister Anne McNamara, PBVM.

The Nordic Model-different perspectives, led by Sister Imelda Poole, IBVM and Sister Adina Bălan, CJ.

Writing as a means of Healing and Growth, led by Sister Eilis Coe, rsc.

As an organisation working within the realms of social media and remote- communications, the value of working smarter- and not just harder- was conveyed with an input on the Global Noticeboard and Hub, new thinking which involves using the website as a tool for work. Mrs Annie Bannister and Mr Guy Insull presented compelling reasons for moving RENATE communication towards the Global Noticeboard. It



was agreed that the Global Noticeboard and Hub could facilitate the collective strengths and community of the Network to accomplish its work more expediently and efficiently.

Mr Markus Janzen, from Porticus gave a presentation on how to be more efficient processes for Strategic Planning, using a Strategic Planning Log Frame, which may also help when making submissions for funding.

A feature of the Assembly, were Silhouettes of figures etched on to display panels throughout the auditorium. On these, participants could use post-it notes to share a thought or comment in response to what they had heard each day. One example being:

“Why can’t we see beyond the physical person who has fallen victim to trafficking and exploitation? The emotional trauma, as well as the physical trauma, extends far into the future as the victim transitions to Survivor.”

Social media was a key instrument for the Assembly, specifically the RENATE website, FaceBook and Twitter account, @RenateEurope1 All of which were put to good effect in conveying updates about the Assembly, far and wide. A dedicated Assembly portal was created on the RENATE website, www.renate-europe.net

where the following can be accessed:

- * Full Assembly Programme.
- * Live streaming of Opening and Closing Liturgies.
- * Assembly photo gallery.
- * Recordings of Press interviews held at the Vatican Press office; Radio interviews on Radio Vaticana.
- * YouTube recording of interview on TV2000.
- * Interview with BBC-Radio York, Jonathan Cowap.

The Assembly portal remains live, as information with reports and commentaries about the Assembly are uploaded.

Assembly papers are available at the Members’ area of the RENATE website.

Amongst the good wishes received by RENATE, were the following:

“US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking send their prayers and best wishes to our Sisters colleagues in Europe as they gather in Rome, for their network meeting.”

“ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Human beings) keep RENATE in our daily prayers as you assemble in Rome.”

RENATE also featured on Mercy International E-News, where the Assembly facilitator, Sister Denise Boyle, fmdm, shared a reflection on the first day of the Assembly, meeting Pope Francis, some of

which stated “... “Revealing his understanding of the complexity of issues related to human



trafficking Francis mentioned the *‘distinctive contribution made by women in accompanying other women and children on a deeply personal journey of healing and reintegration.’* He then shared his

L-r: Denise Boyle fmdm, Lynda Dearlove rsm, Archbishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, Chancelor of the [Pontifical Academy of Science and Social Sciences](#)

hope that our time together during this coming week, will help us be

more effective witnesses to the Gospel, *‘in one of the great peripheries of contemporary society.’* Pope Francis concluded his address by commending each one of the group *‘to the loving intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy,’* after which he gave us his papal blessing.”



A critical component of the Assembly was the discernment process to arrive at a mandate for the next five years. On the final day, following reflection, discussions, group work and plenary sessions, the Assembly engaged in



“dotmocracy,” to prioritise the work for the coming term and arrived at a Commitment Statement which will act as a ‘roadmap’ for the journey ahead from 2016- 2021.

In conclusion, participants began the Assembly, each carrying a single symbolic building brick laid at the entrance to the auditorium.

By the end of the Assembly, the brick wall was re-erected to building a bridge, using each person’s brick to build a network that is stronger together and capable of traversing whatever powerful undercurrents of resistance are encountered.



Anne Kelleher, RENATE Communications.