

Sister Imelda Poole, IBVM president of RENATE (*Religious in Europe Networking against Trafficking and Exploitation*) at the Vatican Sponsored Conference at the UN, 7 April 2016.



At the invitation of the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, Sister Imelda Poole, IBVM, President of RENATE, was amongst a distinguished panel of speakers, invited to present at the Conference entitled ***Ending Human Trafficking by 2030: The Role of Global Partnerships in Eradicating Modern Slavery***. The Conference co-organised by the *Santa Marta Group*, named after Pope Francis' Vatican residence and founded in 2014, aims to strengthen and coordinate the global response to combatting human trafficking and all forms of modern slavery and to galvanise the coordination necessary to implement Targets 5.2, 8.7 and 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Imelda outlined the extent of the work of RENATE and the many Woman Religious with their co-workers, working across 24 European countries to end the slavery of human trafficking.

"We work across borders," she said, "globally, because it is right across the world that women, men, boys and girls are being trafficked within and across porous borders. We have networks of religious in every Continent in the world. All of us come together under *Talitha Kum* in Rome. This is important to us because together we know that we are strong, together we can create actions for good. Our strength comes, not from competition, but from co-operation. Our vision and our passion, comes from love, justice, freedom and truth."

Presenting a photograph taken in 1863, when the world celebrated the abolition of slavery, she reminded the conference of the horror of slavery then and yet "in our 21st century, we have the highest, most clandestine, criminal, lucrative, multi-billion dollar industry of trade in human beings." Quoting Pope Francis, Imelda reminded the conference of his image of slavery and human trafficking as "*...living with that wound in the side of humanity.*"

An analysis of a world map, indicated where trafficking takes place on a north-to-south and east-to-west axis and the stark contrast in terms of the geographical location of the profits arising from human trafficking....mainly accruing to the west.

Quoting RENATE member and Brigidine Sister, Patricia Mulhall, Imelda challenged those present to give serious thought to the following question "We have the demand today for cheap labour, cheap goods, cheap services, but who counts the cost? What is the price?"

Imelda showed a short video ***Called to give a Voice to the Voiceless***, illustrating the various initiatives and actions of the Women Religious and their co-workers in the 24 European countries who form the Network of RENATE. Members are caring for victims in shelters, raising awareness of the issue with many different groups, doing prevention work, training, rehabilitation, advocacy and campaigning.

The video highlights the positive outcomes of consistent support and community engagement for victims, like the Bagel café in Albania, run by survivors of Trafficking, supported by Mary Ward Loreto and Albania Hope project.

Other success stories include the growth of employment opportunities, such as the craft industries in both rural and urban areas, set up for independence and empowerment of victims. As Imelda said, “We ‘walk the walk’ on the streets with those who are suffering from the abuse of traffickers. We have shelters in all our countries where we are working for the rehabilitation of victims. We work in prevention, on the peripheries, in the villages, in the countryside, where poverty is great.”

Imelda called for international co-operation and collaboration to combat human trafficking in three specific areas which she considers require urgent attention:

1. The issue of demand; adopting legislation that criminalises perpetrators and does not treat victims as criminals.
2. To Examine and address the systems of corruption that give rise to human trafficking;
3. Address the problem of Internet trafficking and criminal behaviour that is carried out on the net.

Other distinguished speakers included: Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, Mr. Kevin Hyland, OBE., UK Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, the Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Monsignor Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, the UN Goodwill Ambassador against Human Trafficking Ms. Mira Sorvino and survivor of trafficking Mrs. Donna Hubbard, Airline Ambassadors Human Trafficking Awareness Programme among others.

<http://webtv.un.org/search/ending-human-trafficking-by-2030-the-role-of-global-partnerships-in-eradicating-modern-slavery/4837421498001?term=human%20trafficking>

- You can access the RENATE presentation by scrolling across to the time section 1:22.30.

Prepared by Anne Kelleher, RENATE Communications Person.

Religious in Europe Networking against Trafficking and Exploitation.

communications@renate-europe.net

www.renate-europe.net

