



ORDRE SOUVERAIN MILITAIRE ET HOSPITALIER
DE SAINT JEAN DE JERUSALEM DE RHODES ET DE MALTE

CONFERENCE SUMMARY

**« How to better fight, together, the sexual trafficking of women in
West Africa and to support their rehabilitation? »**

Paris, 8th October 2019



ORDRE DE MALTE
FRANCE

On the 8th October 2019 the Order of Malta organized the symposium « How to better fight, together, the sexual trafficking of women in West Africa and to support their rehabilitation? » which took place at the French Institute of International Relations in Paris.

This symposium was organized in partnership between the Sovereign Order of Malta and the French Association of the Order of Malta at the initiative of the two Ambassadors in charge to combat and monitor trafficking in human beings based in Geneva (**H.E. Michel Veuthey**) and in Lagos, Nigeria (**H.E. Romain de Villeneuve**). The event gathered more than 200 participants and was able to spur nourished debate during the Q&A sessions. The main objectives were both to reinforce the ties between the different stakeholders fighting against human-trafficking for sexual exploitation and, taking the speakers' observations as a starting point, to keep on elaborating common solutions to this issue.

The Grand Chancellor of the Order of Malta, **H.E. Albrecht von Boeselager** opened the meeting recalling the extreme sufferings faced by victims of this form of modern slavery and the importance to support and care for them. This is also to be done through offering them a safe space where they can express themselves and be freed from their precarious situation.



*Opening speech by the Grand Chancellor S.E. Albrecht von Boeselager
© OMF*

Because of its nature, the magnitude of the human trafficking phenomenon is hardly measurable; nevertheless its trends are unequivocal: the number of victims in West Africa, especially in Nigeria, which is the first country of origin for victims of human trafficking sexually exploited in France, has skyrocketed. Warning about the scope of this issue, **H.E. Ambassador Romain de Villeneuve** underlined the need to act in an enlightened and coordinated way in order to prevent demographic pressure and future climate change from further facilitating trafficking in the future.

The event also gave the opportunity to stakeholders and experts on the subject to meet, to discuss current challenges and to strengthen mutual relations aiming at making undertaken operations more effective.

Round tables

The symposium was chaired by **Geneviève Colas**, Coordinator of the Collective "Ensemble contre la traite des êtres humains" ("Together against human trafficking") in France, for the Secours Catholique (Caritas France).

The first round table focused on departure prevention of women and children victims of trafficking. There could take the floor **Arinze Orakwue**, Director of Public Enlightenment, National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP), in Nigeria, **Professor Yinka Omorogbe**, Attorney General and Commissioner of Justice of Edo State and Chairperson of the Taskforce Against Human Trafficking in Nigeria, **Aurélie Jeannerod**, Project and Advocacy Officer Trafficking in Human Beings, ECPAT- France, **Vincent Marchadier**, European Migration Liaison Officer, Delegation of the European Union to the Federal Republic of Nigeria and to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and **Nicolas Le Coz**, Former Chairman of the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA).

The second round table targeted the existing mechanisms at the European level and at the national one in France as well as the opportunities for enhanced institutional cooperation throughout the whole trafficking chain. The speakers on this topic were: **Charles-Eric Clesse**, King's Prosecutor, Professor at the Free University of Brussels (ULB), **Elisabeth Moiron-Braud**, Secretary-General of the Inter-ministerial Mission for the Protection of Women against Violence and the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings (MIPROF) in France, **Police Commanding officer Patrick Cotelle**, Deputy Chief of OCRTEH (Central Office for the Repression of trafficking in human beings), **Vanessa Simoni**, Project Manager at Friends of the Women's Bus, Paris, France and **Federica Marengo**, Coordinator of the National System for the Reception and Protection of Victims of Trafficking (Ac.Sé), France.

The third round table finally was the occasion to refocus the discussion on the individual needs of the person. There took the floor: **Céline Huard**, Psychologist at the AFJ Home in Paris, **Diana Nwakanma**, Rehabilitation consultant for victims returning to Nigeria, **Obstetrician Doctor Kemi DaSilva-Ibru**, MD, MPH, Founder and Director General of WARIF in Nigeria, **Luke de Pulford**, Co-founder and Director of the Arise Foundation and **Sister Patricia Ebegebelum**, Founder of the Bakhita House in Nigeria.



Speech by the Ambassador of Nigeria to France H.E. Irele E. Modupe © Michel Veuthey

Round table n° 1

Better prevent departures and identify trafficking in women and minors

Firstly, Ambassador of Nigeria to France **H.E. Dr. Modupe E. Irele** raised three domains where she believes an enhanced cooperation between French and Nigerian authorities would be beneficial: **departures prevention** from the country of origin, **administrative and judicial procedures** for Nigerian citizens remaining in destination countries and finally **their rehabilitation and integration** into society.

The key elements on the issue of human trafficking in Nigeria

Arinze Orakwue, Director of Public Enlightenment at the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons, Nigeria (NAPTIP*) then drew up a portrait of the **societal challenges** in relation to the status of Nigerian women and children which makes them vulnerable to trafficking. He identified **structural difficulties** that hinder the implementation of public policies at the federal level.

At the same time, Nigeria remains one of the leading countries in the fight against forced migration along with others, such as Gambia. However, even though it is Nigeria's responsibility to operate inside of its own territory, this principle should also apply for European States as far as the prosecution of human traffickers on their territory is concerned. International cooperation is then a fundamental tool in order to increase the number of people brought to justice and allocate more resources to prevention and better victims' protection.

Precisely, NAPTIP's major activities concern the areas of prevention, victims' protection and judicial prosecution of traffickers.

In September 2018, 33 cases linked to trafficking in human beings were dealt with by the Edo State High Court. Judicial prosecution of traffickers however encounters various limits. For instance, it is particularly difficult to gather proofs, notably witnesses, due to the threats received by suspects.

Structural issues in Nigeria

- The failing of infrastructures (especially in the health system), due to the past armed conflict, adds to the population poverty and precariousness, of which many women and children suffer. This is a fertile environment for trafficking of these vulnerable individuals to emerge.
- The strong paternalism of the Nigerian society prevents women empowerment and a good protection of women and girls human rights, who are then more likely to get trapped and believe false promises of easy money.
- A generalized corruption maintains the country in misery despite its abundant oil resources and leaves traffickers on the loose as they can easily avoid judicial proceedings.

« There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children»

Nelson Mandela

*NAPTIP: National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and Related Matters



First round table. From left to right: Professor Yinka Omorogbe, Aurélie Jeannerod, Vincent Marchadier, Nicolas Le Coz, Geneviève Colas and Arinze Orakwue ©OMF

The Taskforce against human trafficking in Nigeria

Professor Yinka Omorogbe, Attorney General and Commissioner of Justice of Edo State and Chairperson of the Taskforce Against Human Trafficking in Nigeria, complemented this state of affairs presenting the action plan implemented within Edo State. This Taskforce against human trafficking was established in 2017. It is composed by 21 members, among which representatives from the police forces, from the intelligence services (DSS), from the Nigerian Immigration Service and from NAPTIP. A 15 people staff Secretariat is also effective.

The foundation of the Taskforce fits the global approach of the Edo State government that projects a coordination matrix among the actors dealing with human trafficking and migration returnees. In sum, it aims at pursuing a policy of « migration management through development».

Its activities, financed by State budgetary allocations, base themselves on a law adopted in 2018. They are deployed through **the judicial prosecution of traffickers**, **the awareness raising** about human trafficking and irregular migration, **the study of root-causes** of these phenomena and **the reception of returnees**.

It's about making victims realize « that their dreams can be fulfilled in Nigeria and not only abroad »

In France, and in Europe at large, still too few victims ask for and get protection and/or do not wish to denounce their exploiters for fear of reprisal against them or against their family remained at home. **Few of them consider returning home as a viable option.**

- * Over the **5046 repatriated people**, 3000 were men and 330 were minors.
- * Some of the young girl returnees were **pregnant**, notably carrying Libyan fathers' babies.

In practice, many victims contact Committee members in order to apply for repatriation from different African countries. These people do not necessarily experience the same trafficking route or network that exploited them. This allows the Committee to get a global overview on the different phenomena and to have at its disposal a factual base and numbers on which they can rely for their operations.

Based on data collected, the Committee implemented a victim monitoring program, which takes care of them through their rehabilitation and re-inclusion. It is common that women and minors who benefited from the program are still attached to its facilities, even multiple years after the events.

The Edo State action plan includes programs pursuing rehabilitation and society reintegration, vocational training for victims and awareness raising activities targeting the public, especially in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods.

The Taskforce put in place awareness raising campaigns in schools, churches, municipal halls and rural communities. In 2018 during a campaign in Uromi its discourse touched upon the life dangers linked to irregular migration and the lies and false promises of traffickers. The message was spread through loudspeakers in the streets, as well as through a door-to-door action and flyers distribution.

Another delegation is charged with welcoming the returnees at the airport and establishing their profile so that their needs of reintegration can be determined and that their trip to Edo State can be facilitated. The program framework involves medical assistance, counselling sessions, 10-days crafting and business training as well as interest-free loans to start one's own company.

To achieve all this, the Taskforce operates in partnership with other State agencies, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), NGOs and private businesses.



From left to right: Sister Patricia Ebegbelum, Ambassador at large of the Order of Malta in charge to combat and monitor human trafficking H.E. Romain de Villeneuve, Diana Nwakanma, Arinze Orakwue, Professor Yinka Omorogbe et Doctor Kemi DaSilva-Ibru © Michel Veuthey

Finding local solutions: the project *Don't pay with your life*

Aurélie Jeannerod, Project and Advocacy Officer Human Trafficking at the NGO ECPAT France, then underlined how important data collection and information sharing are to lead effective and well-targeted prevention campaigns.

On the issue of women and children sexual exploitation, ECPAT France makes a point of working along **with** Nigeria, rather than **on** Nigeria. Its approach is of a holistic nature and is built upon many partnerships, especially on research and analysis missions without which it would be much more difficult to appropriately care for the person as a whole.

The *Packing Project*, broadcasting prevention campaigns in schools, in the radio and in television had an impact over a two years' time on a large part of young girls and their families living around Benin City.

The Project goes on today with the program *Don't pay with your life*, which started out this summer and will go on until June 2020. Counting on the support of local associations and organizations in Nigeria (Caritas, Girls' Power Initiative and NAPTIP), the project aims at fighting human trafficking of young girls and women for sexual exploitation. It draws its strengths from the synergies between the stakeholders operating in the origin and the destination countries.

The project offers to mobilize and reinforce the capacities of local communities, especially focusing on the youth. It stimulates a wider involvement in the **struggle against human trafficking thanks to information campaigns, departures prevention and reinsertion support for young girls that went through repatriation.**

Don't pay with your life

Specific goal 1

Promote children empowerment in relation to their right to be protected against human trafficking.

Outcome 1.1: The children ability to say no to human trafficking is improved through awareness raising sessions, trainings and targeted campaigns.

Specific goal 2

Strengthen prevention measures against trafficking at the family and community level, as well as within child protection systems and Edo State local authorities.

Outcome 2.1: Community members know the high risks of exposure to trafficking and know how to prevent them.

Outcome 2.2: The schooling of the most vulnerable girls is granted beyond the project frame.

Outcome 2.3: Local authorities and actors involved in child protection better understand the issues related to human trafficking and know how to counter them.

Specific goal 3

Improve socio-economic inclusion of young repatriated girls to hinder risks of victimization.

Outcome 3: Young repatriated girls have access to dedicated services to get over their traumas and live without exploitation.

Afterwards it was the occasion for the audience to exchange with the speakers, who could dig deeper on the cultural peculiarities of the Edo State, especially concerning the place of women in the society. The study "Religious, social and criminal groups in the human trafficking of Nigerian women and girls" published by ECPAT in March 2019 was quoted as well explaining this subject: it dwells on the reason why victims having quit Edo State do not want to return. The Q&A session ended on an observation on the lack of involvement on this question by the French State at the departmental level. This comment has been answered that decentralized anti-human trafficking policies do exist. Firstly, the national apparatus for the care and protection of victims of trafficking is present across the whole territory. Secondly, workshops and trainings for professionals are often organized at the local level.

The necessity of institutionalized cooperation

Vincent Marchadier, European Migration Liaison Officer, Delegation of the European Union to the Federal Republic of Nigeria and to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), underlined the commitment of the European Union as well as its cooperation with national entities in the framework of transnational criminal networks prosecution and return assistance. Recalling that migration cannot be apprehended outside of a wider context, notably the economic, demographic and cultural ones, he gave an overview of the « **Migration Package** » project priorities, namely security, migration and mobility, growth and investment.

At the same time, the European Union is financing voluntary returns and long-term reintegration of former victims to the tune of 15 million EUR. This project was launched by the IOM in 2017. From its implementation it has organized almost 15 000 returns, 88% of which coming from Libya and 8% from Niger. The budget line is meant to stop in 2020 but will certainly be renewed considering that 68 000 Nigerian nationals are still on the Libyan soil.

Vincent Marchadier specified that the fight against traffickers is shared concern and he suggested that **all European policies on anti-human trafficking should be harmonized** duplicating the methods used between NAPTIP, Austria and Interpol, especially aiming at financial flux tracking. According to him, prevention is the corner stone of this fight, but it does have limits. New forms of prevention must be considered and alliances between national agencies and national police services have to be formed in Europe.

« *Trafficking [needs to be] addressed not through the classic duo victim/madam, but rather taking into account the involvement of multiple social groups, whose practices do not solely originate from trafficking nor are limited to it. The crime of trafficking [is built upon] an organization that, beside the criminal activity strictly speaking, [relies on] a highly structured and legitimized social, community and religious anchorage. (...) Religious groups (such as « neo-traditional temples » Ayelala in Edo State), Ladies' clubs and cultist groups (namely Black Axe and Supreme Eye Confraternity) are involved in trafficking procedures by utilizing their beliefs, practices and functioning rules for a criminal objective. »*

Translated from

**Groupes religieux, sociaux et culturels dans la traite des êtres humains au Nigéria, ECPAT France, Mars 2019

« Cut off the flux at its origin

The rapprochement between European institutions will necessary require the signature of bilateral treaties in the areas of both police and justice. It will also be crucial to trust national agencies such as NAPTIP and help them to grow, while giving the right weight to the power of criminal networks and tackling directly the financial attractiveness of this traffic for those who enter it; the ultimate goal being to "cut off the flux at its origin".

The fight against networks in Europe and the legislator, prosecution services and judicial authorities' obligations

Nicolas Le Coz, Former President of the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) then stressed the obligations of police forces, prosecutors and judges, namely:

- ✘ **Applying the law regardless of ideology**
The term 'trafficking in human beings' is rarely used by the judicial authorities when the case does not include a transnational aspect. This is a mistake.
- ✘ **Identifying the victims beyond prejudices**
The investigators must be vigilant not to reduce the victims to a stereotyped image of a young woman uneducated and completely frightened. Otherwise, they would miss cases when the victims do not match with this archetype.
- ✘ **Being proactive by using intelligence techniques**
The ideal would be not to wait for the victims to approach the police forces, but to use instead upstream intelligence techniques in order to infiltrate the networks, conduct wiretappings and prepare the ground before presenting the file to the prosecutor. The latter will decide on the basis of this study whether a judicial investigation should be opened or not.
- ✘ **Using the international cooperation tools**
The existing channels are too little used by the stakeholders. For instance, some prosecutors are unaware that they can issue notices via Interpol in order to share alerts and start inquiries. Yet, this procedure can be implemented even in the absence of international agreements, following a customary principle of international law.
- ✘ **Developing joint investigations at the State level**
- ✘ **Better documenting the investigation file**
The heavier the case, the more victims will be heard and protected in the territory.
- ✘ **And enlightening the judges to ensure consistency in sentencing.**

Taking into account the financial component

Without mutual assistance between Nigeria and France, a meaningful survey on the financial assets held in Nigeria remains difficult to conduct.

Yet, those who become traffickers are only looking for profit. It is not surprising that the traffickers begin to worry when surveys are launched with the aim of seizing their properties. Dispossessed of their assets, they would no longer have an interest in participating in human trafficking.

Thus, allowing jurisdictions to seize property and confiscate the assets would represent a real leverage to deter traffickers from committing these crimes.

On the contrary, prison sentences have a reduced dissuasive effect: traffickers agree to be deprived of liberty for a few years if they are guaranteed to recover their money upon release from prison.

Round table n° 2

Identify and protect victims in France and in Europe

This conversation provided an obvious transition to the second major issue discussed by the speakers: the existing mechanisms at the European and French levels to combat trafficking and the opportunities for institutional cooperation across the chain.

The Belgian multidisciplinary approach

Charles-Eric Clesse, Labour Auditor (King's Prosecutor specialized in social law) and Professor at the Free University of Brussels (ULB), then intervened to present the approach of Belgium, which shows very good results in terms of **institutionalized cooperation between the various specialized services on trafficking in human beings**.

In the fight against trafficking and smuggling of human beings, Belgium has chosen a **multidisciplinary** approach. The **Interdepartmental Coordination Unit for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings** brings together all the relevant actors and coordinates a common policy.

Indeed, according to **Charles-Eric Clesse**, « *to better protect, we must better cooperate* »: cooperation should be the cornerstone of the system, via the building of bridges between the police, the judiciary and the inspection services in order to conduct investigations leading to a better identification of victims and a more systematic repression of traffickers.

Better cooperate to better protect

Actors involved:

- ▶ College of General Attorneys and the Department of Criminal Policy
- ▶ Reference Magistrates
- ▶ King's Prosecutor, Labor Auditor
- ▶ Federal Prosecutor's Office
- ▶ Local and Federal Police
- ▶ Social Inspection and Social Law Control Department
- ▶ Criminal Policy Service
- ▶ Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs
- ▶ Foreigners' Office

The Belgian system

To combat trafficking in human beings, Belgium has implemented a multidisciplinary approach.

The coordination at the national level is ensured by the **Interdepartmental Coordination Unit for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings**, which brings together the different ministries, the judiciary, the inspection services and the victims' associations.

The Unit assesses the results of the fight against trafficking and smuggling and collaborates on proposals and policy recommendations in this area. It can also propose legislative changes.

Considering that the Unit only meets two or three times a year, an **office** including the departments of the different services involved in the fight against trafficking and smuggling of human beings has been set up. This office meets every month, ensures the daily operation of the Unit and prepares or executes its decisions, recommendations and initiatives.

Within the Public ministry, a National Expertise Network was established that gathers some reference magistrates from the General Prosecutor's Office, from the King's Prosecutor Office and Labor Audit. It meets every three months and elaborates criminal policy bulletins. It distributes to the human trafficking reference magistrates for human trafficking important information, recent case law and answers their opinion requests on certain matters.

At the judicial district level, a "human trafficking platform" comes together three times per year. It is chaired by the King's Prosecutor in the presence of the Labor Auditor and gathers police and labor inspection services. The Federal center for Migration (Myria) and victims' associations can take part to the meetings.



The second round table. From left to right: Charles-Eric Clesse, Elisabeth Moiron-Braud, Commandant Patrick Cotellet, Vanessa Simoni, Federica Marengo and Geneviève Colas ©OMF

Second National Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings, driven by MIPROF

Elisabeth Moiron-Braud, Secretary-General of the *Inter-ministerial Mission for the Protection of Women against Violence and the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings (MIPROF)* in France, produced an evaluation of the mechanisms in effect to protect the victims since the legal framework was established in 2013-2014. Indeed, the intervention in the framework of this conference took place a few days before the presentation of the Second National Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings (2019-2021).

In France, women, men, children, French people and foreigners, are still being exploited for the purpose of prostitution, enslavement, domestic servitude, submission to forced labor or services, forced begging, or forced crimes. In 2018, associations supported 2918 victims; among them 12% were minors. Sixty-nine pimping networks were dismantled; twenty-seven of them classified as trafficking in human beings and more than 10 million criminal assets were seized.

In particular, the law of 13 April 2016, aiming at strengthening the fight against the prostitution system and supporting prostituted persons, represented a major step forward in the protection of victims. Since then, when they make a complaint or testify against their former network, the victims have access to a full-right residence permit and derogate from the discretionary power of the Prefect. In addition, when they engage into programs to quit forced prostitution, they can benefit from a temporary residence permit of 6 months, renewable regardless of their collaboration with the security forces. This right provides them with exit assistance from prostitution, led by an association, where the victim is extricated from sexual exploitation and integrated in the society in the long term.

« Training professionals is a priority »

Elisabeth Moiron-Braud also announced the highlights of the **new National Action Plan** launched in October. This plan reaffirms the government's commitment to strengthen the fight against trafficking in human beings by training the professionals through an interministerial guide which will provide a common knowledge to each of the stakeholders involved. It also contains a measure providing safe conditions of return for victims from West Africa. This requires a tight cooperation between the States concerned.

MIPROF's national action plan

MIPROF's second action plan was drawn up in concertation with the ministries concerned by the fight against trafficking in human beings, in particular through several inter-ministerial steering committees.

The associations were invited to participate in this consultation during the MIPROF orientation committees, during specific meetings and during *ad hoc* working groups.

« The plan is composed of 45 measures focusing on 6 priorities:

- **Inform and communicate to better prevent** the phenomenon;
- **Define a strategy for the identification of the victims;**
- **Protect and accompany** victims of trafficking;
- **Intensify the repression** of the traffickers;
- **Coordinate public action** against trafficking in human beings;
- **Strengthen cooperation** at European and international levels. »

Source: 2nd Action plan against Trafficking in Human Beings, State Secretariat for Equality between Women and Men and the fight against discrimination



Presidents of the Order of Malta France Jean-Baptiste Favatier and Yann Baggio © Michel Veuthey

« The trafficking networks are extremely mobile and they know no borders »

Police Commanding Officer Patrick Cotelle, Deputy Chief of OCRTEH (Central Office for the Repression of trafficking in human beings), insisted on the following point:

The organizations that make up trafficking networks are extremely mobile and know no borders. Based on this observation, and after successful experiences in dismantling them, the OCRTEH feels the **imperative need for a close, pragmatic, operational and sustainable cooperation that would be beneficial to all.**

As long as organized crime in France is concerned, it is quite easy to materialize the recruitment of victims, the *juju* ceremony, the organization of the migratory chain on the African continent, the localization of the networks, and the prosecution in the public space framed by the *madams*, but it is now a question of going further.



Commanding Officer Patrick Cotelle from OCRTEH and Arinze Orakwue from NAPTIP © Michel Veuthey

He then called « [his] colleagues present but also the Nigerian authorities » to build a collective effort focused around the following areas:

- Identify the victims upstream in their country of origin to prevent them from enlisting in an international trafficking network
- Identify and block the profits generated by the traffickers when they are transferred to the country of origin

This money, he suggested, is a financial windfall that could be used to protect the victims, reintegrate them and give them the opportunity of a fresh start.

OCRTEH surveys

OCRTEH has developed a unique expertise in identifying the financial mechanisms that allow traffickers to collect the money and send it to Nigeria. They use Benin City-based exchange offices which receive this money from European countries. Thus, traffickers operating in Belgium, France or Spain all share the same addresses of exchange offices in Benin City.

In 2018, OCRTEH conducted a major survey of these financial services. The objective was to understand how much money was generated and the mechanisms put in place to deal with it. The investigation lasted 18 months.

Collection spots have been identified in Paris and throughout France, each collector having a network of influence and specialized carriers between Nigeria and France. Money suitcases were found and the addresses of the exchange offices were identified.

This survey also highlighted the Nigeria confraternities involved in collecting and repatriating the money.

Then, these elements were transmitted to the Nigerian authorities. OCRTEH is expecting the results with high hopes.

The structure dismantled last year had repatriated between 30 and 50 million euros, from France to Nigeria. The same goes for the other European countries. 90% of this money comes directly from prostitution.

«We must make this commitment by thinking of all the victims who arrive in Europe and are abused, exploited, used. This is our imperative and immediate duty. But we cannot do it by ourselves, we need you. »

On this point, the audience wondered about the available resources to the experts to **know the truth** of each situation. Consensually, the speakers recognized how paramount building a climate of trust was to ensure that the victim feels sufficiently protected to testify. Such a climate of trust often involves a period of reflection during which the victim has the opportunity to reconsider her statement, before it gets useful to the investigators.

Commandant Cotelie then explained the reasons why no investigation was ever launched on the sole basis of the victims' statements. According to him, the police forces prefer to take the elements given during the hearing without formalizing them in an official report to avoid putting judicial pressure on a single victim and to protect her until the arrest of the traffickers.

A discussion then emerged to «*make shame change sides*»: some experts present in the audience argued that the fight should also focus on **dissuading customers**, while others expressed their apprehension regarding **a sentence that could encourage illegality and precariousness by hiding prostitution in less accessible areas**.

Question from the audience:

« We are talking about international cooperation, yet I am surprised to notice the presence of very young women in prison. They are usually accused of human trafficking while they are also victims themselves. How do you explain that? »

The answer of Charles-Eric Clesse, King's Prosecutor:

« Unfortunately, it is quite common that people who have been exploited themselves climb the ladder of the network's hierarchy and become traffickers. They do not always realize the role they are playing by doing so. »

« Shame must change sides »

Empowering the community: the challenges of exiting the networks

The interventions of **Vanessa Simoni**, Project Manager within the *Association Friends of the Women's Bus*, and of **Federica Marengo**, from the *National System for the Reception and Protection of Victims of Trafficking (Ac.Sé)*, gave an overview of the challenges of exiting the prostitution network as long as victims' care is concerned.

The complexity of the traffic in human beings is becoming better understood. Today more than yesterday, the stakeholders measure the interpenetration of professional and social networks and the family networks of victims. This context led to a better understanding of the phenomenon as well as a better-shared diagnosis of the territory. However, such an awareness also came with a negative counterpart that can sometimes go against the victims' interest: mistrust, paranoia, excessive intrusion into their lives... Consequently, the objectives related to exiting a victim from the network may be confused.

Refocusing the action around the community and generating a normative change

To do so:

- ✓ It is essential to allow the former victims to maintain the relationships built within the network in order to **generate a collective thought and a common discourse**.
- ✓ It is also symbolically important for their individual and collective reparation to **ensure that the law is applied**.
- ✓ We must also help them to **develop their resources economically** so that they become models for the younger ones.
- ✓ Lastly, it is necessary to tackle, be it in France or in Nigeria, structural issues such as racism and the stigma linked with prostitution, as they have a negative impact on whistle blowing and access to the law.

Vanessa Simoni insisted on the need for a secured supervision of former victims while **refocusing the action around the community, in order to bring down the collective representations related to money and to promote a change of norms**.

Trafficking is rather commonplace in the Nigerian network in France. It is, in some cases, admitted and even normal, to come, to send or to bring to Europe a girl who will have no other solution than repaying her trip by prostituting herself. This life trajectory is valued within the group, and victims of trafficking often represent an inspiration for young people, while those who refuse to pay their debts (and go to the court) are excluded from the group, humiliated and judged as betrayers in France or in Nigeria.

It is therefore **essential for a new collective thinking to emerge so that the women exiting the prostitution network are not reduced to a status of isolated victims**, emphasized **Federica Marengo**. She further specified that **social workers** report the following issues when dealing with former victims of trafficking:

- ✦ On one hand, the security of the person is usually guaranteed by **distancing her geographically** and severing her ties from the network. This situation often creates a feeling of exclusion and injustice.
- ✦ On the other hand, the procedure involves asking the person to **identify herself as being in danger** and in need of protection, which amounts to reducing her to her status of victim.

Ac.Sé's strategy therefore focuses on this status of victim in order to open access to several rights, before allowing the victim to come out to reclaim her identity; an identity infinitely richer and more resilient.

The national network Ac.Sé

Ac.Sé was created in 2001 by the ALC association, which is in charge of its coordination.

Ac.Sé receives referral requests from any professional in contact with a victim of trafficking and finds a place for housing or any other appropriate support through its network of 75 associations.

Ac.Sé is part of the protection measures for the victims of trafficking in France provided by the decree no. 2007-1352 of 13th September 2007, relative to the « admission for residence, the protection, the reception and accommodation of foreign victims of human trafficking ». The National Action Plan against Trafficking 2014-2016 mentions Ac.Sé as the tool for protecting victims of trafficking in France. Its missions are the following:

- Providing accommodation and support far from the place of residence of the victim in danger or highly vulnerable
- Acting as a resource centre for professionals in contact with victims



French Association of the Order of Malta President Thierry de Beaumont-Beynac and the Grand Chancellor H.E. Albrecht von Boeslager ©Michel Veuthey

Table ronde n° 3

Grasping the issue of rehabilitation of victims and reconstruction of their future

Opening the last round table, **Céline Huard**, psychologist at the AFJ Home in Paris, related the moving story of an ordinary day at the housing center she works in, in order to shed some light on the challenges faced from day one to the day of departure to achieve victims' reconstruction and **treat their traumas**.

« [Extract] **7 am**: As every morning, the House starts to wake up, even if some women could not really sleep at all. **Finding oneself in a securing environment is not enough to calm down anxieties**.

Precious, a young Nigerian woman, does not dare to close her eyes fearing to die if she falls asleep. She fears spirits will attack her, her, who has not honored the oath of the juju ritual and her, who lodged a complaint. Every night, when she goes to her room, she hangs on the phone with her boyfriend until her body is exhausted. Some women pray to fall asleep, other need sleeping pills.

*Last night, it was Faith, another Nigerian girl, who was pervaded by flashbacks of her sea crossing from Libya and has fainted at the night supervisor's feet. Despite the attempts to wake her up, her body stays stiff and tight. It was necessary to call the firefighters, who will say she is pretending. Nonetheless, it was indeed a **traumatic fainting, a state of extreme dissociation of one's body, that allows a traumatized person to avoid feeling what is unbearable. It's a defensive state of consciousness**.*

9 am: *Faith complains that she has again « something banging in her head ». Psychosomatic disturbs are frequent for trafficking victims. Feeling of tiredness, of heat, of suffocation, of alienation... The body expresses what could not be expressed before when they were in a survival world and a survival mode. These women need someone to take care of them, witnessed by the shattered words they sometimes voice, their cries for help... **"Take care of me"...** which most of the time are the sign of a physical and psychological exhaustion. »*

The second speaker, **Diana Nwakanma**, Rehabilitation consultant for victims returning to Nigeria, on her side insisted on the barriers that women have to face upon their return to Nigeria: often lacking basic education, they only have poor skills and their mental and physical well-being is bad, due to the traumas they endured.

Hence the need to develop a **reintegration program for victims returning to Nigeria** taking into account all relevant axes : post-traumatic care, a change in the social perception and the development concept or the re-appropriation of skills allowing to reduce the vulnerability of former victims from trafficking networks.



The third round table. From left to right: Céline Huard, Diana Nwakanma, Doctor Kemi DaSilva-Ibru, Luke de Pulford, Patricia Egebelum and Geneviève Colas ©OMF © OMF

The WARIF Centre & The Bakhita House

Underlining precisely this need of better cooperation among medical, socio-administrative and judicial stakeholders, the Obstetrician **Doctor Kemi DaSilva-Ibru**, MD, MPH, Founder and Director General of the *Women at Risk International Foundation* (WARIF) in Nigeria, presented the content of the care package delivered by her foundation. In fact, by giving a safe haven and medical follow-up to former victims, **the center is able to manage trauma issues, but it does need partnerships** in order to offer the victims the most complete support possible.

The WARIF Centre

In Lagos, the WARIF Centre aims at filling these gaps offering healthcare services (e.g. HIV and other sexually transmissible diseases tests) as well as emotional support for the victim. The Centre especially deals with immediate needs arising from panic attacks and crises of stress that the victim experiences because of the break of the juju oath. For a trafficking victim, hearing that she is free does not automatically open up for her a large path of opportunities, which can cause depression phases or suicidal tendencies.

Sister Patricia Ebegbelum directly echoed this recommendation introducing the Bakhita House in Lagos, of which she is the Coordinator and that is the fruit of the collaboration between the Order of Malta and the Congregation of the Saint Louis Sisters. The House is aimed to take care and follow step after step repatriated victims, in a reassuring family atmosphere. Everything is done to give to women a sense of safety, belonging and kindness.

She also called the authorities to facilitate the delivery of official identity documents, which are crucial for reinsertion.

The Consul of Nigeria to France, **Luka Bokko**, then intervened to take note of this necessity and recalled the existing cooperation between Nigerian authorities and civil society organizations. He further reiterated the **willingness of Nigerian authorities to provide former victims willing to return home with the appropriate documents.**

« People can get back into the proper documentation system if they accept to go back to Nigeria »



Sister Patricia Ebegbelum and the Grand Hospitalier H.E. Dominique La Rochefoucauld-Montbel © Michel Veuthey

The Bakhita House

At the Bakhita House, the welcoming and support of victims is developed around three phases:

Firstly, the victim gets in touch from abroad. This first contact will lay the foundations of a future relation of trust.

After the pick up at the airport, the Sisters receive them with a welcome party where everything is done to give them a sense of safety, belonging and goodwill.

Once the victim feels reassured she is received by NAPTIP agents who register her comeback and help the House to deal with traffickers if needed. According to the Sisters NAPTIP's help is crucial to give former victims the guarantee that traffickers will not get back to them.

Afterwards begins the long-term rehabilitation through a transformational approach aiming at reconstructing a sentiment of dignity prior to reintegration in the Nigerian society.

The need for a community-based support

The speech given by **Luke de Pulford**, Co-founder and Director of the Arise Foundation, stepped in that direction.

Remarking the correlation between a weak social capital («*trust*») and a higher vulnerability, **he recommended Nigeria to focus on improving social capital.**

In order to transform cultural prejudices and give new future perspectives to Nigerian women, **Nigeria can especially count on existing faith-based organizations** operating on the ground. They are precious partners with valuable resources and experience, notably in educational programs.

The creation of this social capital is difficult. It takes time and patience, which is far from being the common approach. For this reason, it is important for the assistance from NGOs and foundations like Arise and other anti-slavery organizations to be both dynamic and targeted, in order to attract new collaborations.

In this regard, **Luke de Pulford** added that: “*no institution understands the need to see the big picture better than the Order of Malta, which has been doing this work for 900 years*”. In fact, the Order of Malta is able to “take the long view” and adopt a “person-to-person approach”. In fine, as it “*stand[s] at this new juncture on the issue of human trafficking, [it is] superbly well placed to leverage [its] broad network [...] which prizes partnership development and trust building [...]. Perhaps even more importantly [the Order of Malta is] well placed to insist on individual human dignity and the spirit of unconditional loving accompaniment that is at the heart of true charity, and is necessarily local*».

The vision of Arise Foundation

Arise Foundation is a powerfully networked civil society organization in the field of anti-trafficking and fight against modern slavery. It focuses on building up strong partnerships networks that are a leading example in the countries of origin. Its activities vary from awareness raising and monitoring on human rights violations, to technical advice to decision makers, seeking redress and care-taking for victims.

In its 2018 Report the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons lamented this state of affairs, stating that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) suffer from a high donor dependency as they «*have to scramble for funding from private entities and international donors*». Hence, their room for maneuver is restricted in terms of resources and possible actions.

Therefore, the handling of potential victims of trafficking implies more **community-based actions** so that the correlation between social capital weakness and the likelihood to get caught in the trafficking network becomes less obvious. Supporting victims is only conceivable at the local level and thus can benefit from the admirable work of religious congregations; whose transnational network is unrivalled.

Conclusion

Closing the symposium, **H.E. Ambassador Michel Veuthey** reminded the main issues discussed during the meeting and thanked all the participants for their commitment. During this forenoon rich in testimonies and outlooks, participants took stock of, became aware of and were confronted with the scale of the tragedy of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation, especially in Western Africa and in Europe.

According to **H.E. Ambassador Veuthey**, it is now time to move from words to action, firstly through a **wide information and education effort**, starting with the training of professionals. This same effort must be undertaken at all levels « *in order to adapt strategies to the growing and changing needs of victims and their families, to change mindsets in the hit communities, to render individual free thinking to victims, to help them in their economic development, to end traffickers impunity, to release these women from moral judgment, the stigma of prostitution and racism. Finally, to overturn the burden of shame.* »

Because, he highlighted, « **we have a lot to learn from victims and trafficking survivors** ».

The symposium took end with the words of **His Excellency the Grand Hospitaller** of the Sovereign Order of Malta, **Dominique de La Rochefoucauld-Montbel**, who thanked the speakers for having insisted on the collective responsibility to help the 40 million victims in need of individualized assistance.

He recalled that this commitment must be strongly deployed, both in origin, transit and destination countries, **in order to prevent, to protect, and to rehabilitate the human person**. When necessary, cases must also be brought to justice. He also praised the success of this symposium, demonstrated by the quality of formal and informal exchanges that took place. Finally, **His Excellency the Grand Hospitaller** called for the mobilization of all communities for



Closing speech of the Grand Hospitaller H.E. Dominique de La Rochefoucauld-Montbel © OMF



Closing speech by Ambassador at large of the Order of Malta in charge to combat and monitor human trafficking H.E. Michel Veuthey

the liberation of slaves of our time, on the fifth anniversary of the inter-religious call against contemporary slavery, on December 2nd. His proposal is as follows: we need **to turn the fight against trafficking in human beings into a governmental and intergovernmental high priority**.

By facilitating networking, the conference indeed achieved its objective to strengthen synergies, partnerships and alliances between different agencies and regional and international organizations and local NGOs and CSOs, without forgetting local confessional organization.



Annex

I. Opening speech by the Grand Chancellor of the Sovereign Order of Malta H.E Albrecht von Boeselager

Excellences,

Esteemed colleagues,

Distinguished guests,

It is with great pleasure that I address today such a competent congregation of experts in countering and preventing human trafficking, in particular women sexual trafficking. I am glad to see in the same room familiar faces of the Order of Malta, academics, policy experts and, above all, victims of exploitation that our facilities have supported.

I would like to express my gratitude to Ordre de Malte France for having organized this event, which I am sure will lead to a stronger collaboration in the field of combating human trafficking. Thank you also to the "Institut Français des Relations Internationales » (IFRI), for hosting this meeting at their headquarters.

This event is one of the first tangible outcomes of a joint effort that the Order of Malta- one of the world's oldest Catholic institutions, which relies on a widespread network of entities and volunteers - initiated in 2017, with the nomination of two Ambassadors at large tasked with raising awareness, combating and preventing human trafficking.

Since then a lot has happened in the world, and the numbers of this dire phenomenon have grown. It is important to point out the significant and worrying increase in adolescent victims of trafficking. According to the 2018 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, girls account for 23 percent of all trafficking victims, up from 21 percent in 2014 and 10 percent in 2004. If the victims are women, exploitation is primarily sexual, in 72 percent of cases, followed by labor exploitation in 20 percent of cases.

As you all know, it is extremely difficult to provide precise data on victims of human trafficking at a global level. But what we do know is that with over 40 million human trafficking victims worldwide, there are more slaves today than at any time in history.

No country is immune from this problem. It happens in every corner of the globe, where crisis and wars are underway disrupting and displacing local communities. Likewise, it happens in unsuspecting households, restaurants and shops in rich European and US capitals and in the fertile lands of Western countries, where men and women are forced to work 12/14 hours a day and often die out of exhaustion or during the perilous bus trips to get to the tomato fields.

Since its first steps in tackling this dreadful human drama, the Order of Malta has adopted a holistic and comprehensive approach, as today's conference well demonstrates. We firmly

believe that any action aimed at countering human trafficking and, in particular women sexual exploitation, should always keep respect for human rights and physical, social and psychological well-being of the individual as a guiding light. The Order's mission to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime is closely cooperating with its Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling section and is actively participating in the Working Groups established to fight this terrible scourge.

But this is not solely a human rights violations issue, it is also a security threat. Modern slavery produces an estimated 150 billion dollars annually in profits: human trafficking has effectively and dramatically become one the most profitable crimes. Trafficking victims, of which women represent 51 per cent of total number and whose exploitation is primarily sexual, have become another commodity in a savage industry involving narcotic drugs as well as weapons and organ trafficking.

In Nigeria, where every year tens of thousands of women and girls are trafficked primarily to Europe and across West Africa, human trafficking has become a tactic of war. In Northern Nigeria, in particular, the abduction of women and girls by Boko Haram represents a deliberate strategy generating revenue. Earlier this year, a center providing psychosocial assistance to trafficked women returning home was opened in Lagos thanks to the partnership established by our Ambassador at large Romain de Villeneuve with local organizations. The women assisted have found protection, psychological support and most of all hope for a new life. One of them is here today to bear witness to the cruelty and ruthless treatment inflicted upon her and I thank her wholeheartedly for her courage to give voice to all victims.

The instruments traffickers use to lure these young women into prostitution and involuntary domestic servitude are hard to describe, involving psychological and physical violence and submission. Unimaginable painful rituals are inflicted inducing the victim to feel obliged to comply and obey to her traffickers and to believe that breaking the voodoo oath sealed in front of a shaman will result in awful consequences for her and her family. As a result of this "commitment" – as the International Organization of Migration has widely reported– these women promise not to reveal the names of the traffickers and other useful details that may lead to the identification of exploiters, making it more difficult to act against this criminal business.

The psychological trauma these women experience should never be neglected, and the role of professionals is key in approaching the victims as we have seen in our many facilities in Germany specializing in first assistance and integration of migrants and refugees. Allowing victims to speak out is a crucial step in the effort to untangle a sophisticated industry that acts on poverty and desperation. Many of these women are unaware of the extent of the psychological submission they will have to endure. To this end promoting an effective communication in the countries of origin to make the victims aware of the real risks that their adventure will imply, is key.

Raising awareness within local communities and in the international arena is a crucial challenge that we have undertaken with our Ambassador at large Michel Veuthey, based in Geneva. Here the Order is an active player in the humanitarian fora, participating in meetings organized by the United Nations, regional organizations, and civil society -such as academia, business and media. By establishing and strengthening synergies with the Holy

See, with faith-based organizations, and with dedicated NGOs, the Order has developed a strong network of partners in Switzerland, Italy, the UK and the US, in addition to Germany and Nigeria as mentioned earlier.

The Order also develops projects in impoverished communities, lowering considerably the risk of young girls being abducted. This is true in particular for displaced people living in refugee camps: in Uganda for example the Order of Malta provides clean water so that girls can attend school and are not forced to walk miles to collect drinking water, becoming easy prey to criminal gangs.

The Order of Malta provides protection and assistance to victims of trafficking, giving them a chance of a new beginning, it encourages the international community to commit in the fight against human trafficking; it supports governments, civil society organizations, international organizations, and the private sector to combat human trafficking advocating to improve anti-trafficking legislation and to promote slave free labels for goods and services.

We must continue channeling our efforts toward relieving the plight of women victims of traffickers. Likewise, we must also continue providing assistance to the many thousands of refugees and migrants in all stages of their quest for a better life.

I am sure this meeting today will be rich in exchanges and ideas and will forge new joint efforts aimed at countering human trafficking.

I wish you all a fruitful day,

Thank you.

II. Synthesis by Michel Veuthey, Ambassador at large of the Sovereign Order of Malta to combat and monitor trafficking in human beings

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

First of all, thank you to all the speakers and participants, and to the moderator, Geneviève Colas.

The Order of Malta, as its Grand Chancellor Albrecht v. Boeselager reminded us at the outset, is active against trafficking in human beings in many areas, both operational and diplomatic.

And we certainly have much to learn from other actors, both governmental and civil society, starting with the victims themselves and the organizations - religious or not - that assist victims, trapped, deceived, magically practiced, raped and abused, both physical and psychological.

During this very dense morning, very rich in testimonies and perspectives, we were able to take stock, become aware of and be confronted with the scale of the tragedy of trafficking in human beings - in human beings considered as objects, exchange products, commodities - and other forms of contemporary slavery, particularly in Africa and Europe, in the face of the power of national and transnational criminal trafficking networks, and the millions, if not billions, of blood money generated by these trafficking.

Several speakers stressed the need to increase collaboration, conclude cooperation agreements, establish partnerships to prevent, protect and rehabilitate, enable victims to leave prostitution, regularize their stay in France, not to mention the obligation of all States to coordinate their police forces, cooperate between jurisdictions to prosecute the various forms of trafficking and provide victims with the means to obtain compensation for the damage they have been subjected to.

These exchanges between actors from new horizons should contribute to the development and strengthening of solutions, mutual assistance and cooperation for States and civil society with a view to broad mobilization and a shared effort to stem the rise of this scourge and to consider the abolition of slavery at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Governmental bodies, international organizations, starting with IOM and UNODC, and regional organizations - in particular the European Union and the Council of Europe - and sub regional organizations, such as ECOWAS, civil society organizations, humanitarian and human rights NGOs, the private sector, local communities and diasporas, the media - starting with radio and television, as well as film producers - and of course research, analysis and training institutes, schools, are all called upon to contribute to this struggle.

The contribution of individual personalities, particularly in Nigeria in Edo State, where the situation is worrying, was noted.

The testimony of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Louis in Lagos reminded us of the unique role that spiritual leaders and faith-based organizations play in the countries of origin, transit and destination of trafficked persons in raising awareness and helping to mobilize all actors.

It is not only the international treaties that must be applied and implemented, in particular the Palermo Protocol of 2000, to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime And the Council of Europe Convention of 2005 on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and National Legislation, but also the universal values of humanity and solidarity, respect for the life and dignity of the person, that will guide us to achieve this objective.

It is a vast effort of information and training - starting with the training of professionals who may have to deal with trafficking - that we must undertake at all levels to adapt our efforts to the growing and changing needs of victims and their families and entourage, to change attitudes in affected communities, to restore free thinking to victims, to help them develop economically, to stop the impunity of traffickers, to remove these women from moral judgment, the stigma of prostitution, and racism. And to reverse the burden of shame, from women to clients of prostitution, although this penalization of clients is not unanimously accepted, even if women - who will be against it - must be respected in their dignity, regardless of their race, nationality or social status.

It is a long-term struggle, across borders, requiring a multidimensional mobilization of human, financial and economic resources as well as collaboration between public and private actors, between different Governments, starting with France and Nigeria, between different Ministries, between private foundations and civil society organizations, between lawyers, judges, doctors, psychologists and religious leaders. An interdisciplinary approach is needed, involving different actors to understand the problem, to adapt to local conditions, to identify victims, protect them, take care of them, allow them to leave the networks, protect them, take the time to help them rebuild themselves medically, psychologically and professionally, to reintegrate into host communities or communities of origin, to protect them permanently, in particular in professional reintegration programs, to encourage them to be independent, to give them back a sense of dignity, children of God, to be able to support themselves and their families, and to prevent them from falling back into the traps of slavery. And to do this, it is necessary to rebuild trust within local and national communities.

And now, "res non verba", let's move from words to action.

And, for this reason, the concluding message of the Order of Malta's Grand Hospitaller, Dominique de La Rochefoucauld-Montbel, should open up some perspectives.

Thank you again to all of you for this very lively morning of exchanges.

III. Closing speech by Grand Hospitalier of the Sovereign Order of Malta H.E. Dominique de La Rochefoucauld-Montbel

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank you for your numerous presence here today and to have come from close and afar to share with us the concern for this little-known scourge that is human trafficking. I especially thank the Order of Malta France, our Nigerian guests and IFRI that is hosting us, not to forget daily engaged associations and organization representatives.

I personally thank you for your testimonies on this often unknown reality and to have challenged our – both authorities and civil society – responsibility to provide assistance to the 40 million people victims of trafficking worldwide, each victim needing so much individual attention to be duly supported.

Today we have mostly talked about women exploited as sexual slaves, but we should not forget the tens of million people victims of other forms of contemporary slavery, I thank you for your observations from the field.

Our commitment must deeply deploy itself, in space and time: in origin, transit and destination countries, everyone in the frame of their mission and competencies, in order to prevent, protect, rehabilitate, and when necessary to pursue in front of national and international Courts. We stay at your disposal to share our experience, but we also stay receptive to your learned-lessons so that we can find the best synergies.

An important aspect, both for prevention, protection and rehabilitation, is training which must go hand in hand with ethical education. To learn a profession is not enough. One still has to develop love and respect for his home, family, close-ones and society as well. Through training, education and enhanced awareness by decision-makers and populations, together we will implement a sustainable development that tackles the causes and consequences of modern slavery.

However, if we want to succeed, we also have to relieve victims of their suffered traumas that render any future fragile.

This important symposium, to which you participated, shall only be the beginning of a common commitment and shared action aiming at countering this tragedy.

In my duty of Grand Hospitalier of the Sovereign Order of Malta, I praise the formal and informal exchanges that this symposium allowed to take place. It is certain that no government, no international organization, nor any humanitarian organization, can face alone the resurgence and the growth of the scourge of human trafficking and of other forms of slavery. We must share our concerns, our best practices, and our proceedings. Even if they are different, let us make them complementary and together put traffickers out of action and in doing so also countering illegal financial fluxes and corruption.

The Sovereign Order of Malta will continue to strengthen its action in favor of women and other victims of human trafficking, as well as its advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy efforts and its joint actions with its partners, among which the European Union, Member States Governments, international, universal, regional, sub-regional organization and so on.

We are open to the idea of reiterating, date and place to be determined, this platform of dialogue to maintain the focus on this question, since the approach must be long-term and multi-level. In fact, our exchanges have to be fostered and our efforts adapted to the victims' needs evolution.

Nevertheless, it is also a challenged addressed to us all, and if I had to suggest a common action I would say that the fight against human trafficking – the slavery of our times – shall become a governmental and intergovernmental priority. The human dignity is at stake.

Thank you for your attention.

