



Human Trafficking: Issues Beyond Criminalization

Seminar on

Trafficking with a Special Focus on Children

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Margaret Archer, PASS President

Your Highness,

Eminences,

Excellencies,

Friends and Colleagues,

Since Pope Francis asked the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences to examine human trafficking in 2013, we have done this in various meetings; meetings with the police, meetings with youth, meetings with different religious leaders, because as with every social encyclical and all parts of Catholic social teaching, these are addressed to all people of good will. And this is what we need if we are to make any progress with the elimination of human trafficking, which was the subject of our Plenary meeting last week, in which what we sought to do was to carry the agenda further forward.

We take moral outrage at this practice for granted. Our aim is to do something beyond being outraged, something practical that can restore the damaged lives of trafficked human beings. And so we called our meeting: *Issues Beyond Criminalization*. Criminalisation – Cardinal Turkson put in exactly the same words as I used – is a necessary condition for the abolition of human trafficking, but it is not a sufficient condition for remedying the consequences for the 20 million victims, a number which is obviously an underestimate, a number, however, that is growing, even according to official statistics. A number that is growing for one reason, which has already been mentioned. This is a one hundred and sixty billion dollar profit operation per year. It is almost exceeding the profitability of smuggling drugs. Hence the reaction in so many nations has been: ‘Let’s sign up to the Palermo Protocol, but let’s work purely on the supply side. Let’s work at reducing the numbers of traffickers and successful traffickings’.

Now that is indispensable, there is no argument about this, and it was very, very encouraging to see what Interpol and Europol were doing together to try and reduce the arrival of trafficked persons throughout the areas for which they are responsible. So our emphasis this week has been on looking at resettlement of trafficked people, rather than criminalizing the act of ‘trafficking’, important as that is. What we want to avoid is something that exists in every country, which in its own way ratifies the Palermo Protocol with a national law. And most of these, if you analyse them – and particularly if you analyse what is not said in them, like the most recent bill passed six weeks ago in the United Kingdom – there is no word about repatriation. This is a silence. It is a legal silence. But what it does is to give the powers of repatriation to the government and the state and the police authorities.

Now resettlement has problems. It must be voluntary, of course, because these people have paid enough already in terms of damage to their lives in coming to a particular destination which may even have been unknown to them. So instead of this semi-automatic repatriation, which is very dangerous, because insofar as there have been qualitative rather than quantitative studies, various organisations and international organisations have shown that approximately half of those who were trafficked were introduced to their traffickers by friends and family. So we must not idealise being returned home. This is not necessarily being received into loving arms and indeed it might be quite dangerous and risky for various reasons, but one of which is that trafficked people have additional knowledge. They can name names. They might not be able to name the mastermind behind that particular trafficking route, but they can name the person who gave them their fake documentation etc. so we want provisions made for informed choice about return or remain. Where victims choose to remain in the country of destination, we want a highly-tuned sensitive resettlement programme, which involves so many things from medical care, trauma counselling, language learning, to those things that all of us take completely for granted – “How do you go shopping in this country?” – and this is where voluntary organisations who say, “Oh, but we’re not experts’ can come in. No, they’re not experts, but it doesn’t matter. They can take somebody shopping, they can befriend them; there is a role for everybody in resettlement.

There are many difficult issues about trafficking; one is what happens when trafficked people grow older. If they were trafficked for forced labour, they become a less valuable worker in financial terms; if they were trafficked into the sex trade they become a less desirable commodity. And thank you so much that Sweden has led the way with this legislation, that Norway has followed with a similar form of legislation. Well, we heard an evaluation of it. They admit the methodology is not perfect, but in social sciences it never is perfect. But it did show that the demand by clients for using trafficked women as sex workers was diminishing. And this is extremely important, and the government of France is now debating on roughly similar lines, not identical, but it shows that your example has spread and is being extremely influential.

Now what I would like to end up on, is talking for a very short while on the difficulties of children in relation to resettlement and return and policies of good will towards those children who are completely innocent of the things that were done to them. So, on the one hand, we are talking about the direct trafficking of children themselves. Children who are taken to be used in a forced capacity, as beggars, as forced labourers, particularly in things like the textile industry where some of the machinery requires small people, little people, just as it did in the days of the Industrial Revolution, to use the machinery; as well as both Her Majesty and Minister Regne#r mentioned, of course being used as objects, subjects, for pornography and perhaps in some cases, well, certainly in some cases, but we cannot give figures, not just pornography but paedophilia.

So there is a great unanswered question here. What becomes of these children as they mature, reach puberty, reach the age of twenty or so? Do they graduate into other forms of forced labour? We simply need the research here, and we don't have it. Secondly, trafficked children pose a huge dilemma for their mothers and usually for their fathers too. I'll just put it in three ways: if the children or child is left behind while one or both of the parents are trafficked, that child becomes an object of leverage on the trafficked parent or parents, "Obey, do what we tell you or – there is the blackmail – your child, children at home will pay for it, they will suffer". It is very difficult to know how to articulate a policy that could deal with those kinds of threats.

Secondly, suppose the child or children are brought with their mother and father, and arrive at some trafficked destination. They can be used in a different sense of blackmail, to reconcile the mothers and/or fathers to certain forms of servitude, often domestic servitude, and this came very much into prominence two or three months ago in Sicily in fruit picking and horticultural work, where initially the mothers who had their children with them said, "This isn't bad, it's OK. All I have to do is pick fruit; yes, the hours are long, the pay is uncertain, but the children can play in the sun in an agricultural setting". Then it became clear that, as the women – these were largely women – reconciled themselves to this type of forced labour, they were then having nightly visits from various male indigenous agricultural workers, overseers, and in fact they were trafficked into prostitution as well as into agricultural work. But the children were a form of leverage into this situation.

Then finally there can be the promise made at the country of origin: "Yes you are going to work in a shoe factory, fruit picking, construction or whatever it may be, and yes your child can come with you". And this can be, it isn't always by any means, but it can be one of the most hideous forms of trafficking, because these can be some of the children who are simply used as bodies from which organs, physical organs, are harvested. And so one of our recommendations which is ecumenical, it's for those of good will, of faith or none, to try and spread a policy, voluntary again, where people, all citizens are encouraged to carry a voluntary organ donor card in case of a road accident or some other exigency that leaves them brain dead, let somebody else be the beneficiary of it.

So, in conclusion, thank you, Queen Silvia, for having brought us to recognise that the problem of trafficked children is one about which we are most ignorant: most ignorant about the damage done; medical damage, psychological damage, attitudinal damage, the therapies needed, and the time span that they will take; desperately ignorant about how realistic it is to try unite a trafficked child with a trafficked parent, mother or father. How do you bring two people who have been very differently traumatised, together? Where do you do it? How long does it take? What can you do that helps to make this traumatic journey of theirs as short as possible and frees them from pain as quickly as possible?

And finally, socially, how can we gradually integrate these, let's call them "united children with one or both parents", how can we include them into mainstream society? What can we do? This must be our ultimate ambition of all of us working in this area. What can we do to help them to realise their full human dignity?

Thank you.