



## International Networks to Prevent Trafficking and to Rescue and Re-integrate the Victims

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SEMINAR ON

**TRAFFICKING WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON CHILDREN**

CASINA PIO IV, VATICAN CITY

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**Sister Eugenia Bonetti**

Consolata Missionary Sister, President of Slaves No More

*Inspired by the words of Pope Francis that 'Human Trafficking is Modern Slavery' and that this practice is a 'Crime against Humanity,' the purpose of the seminar is to highlight the special situation of children as victims of human trafficking as well as what measures, be it national legislation or international efforts, can be taken to protect better the rights of children. Practical examples of how children are affected and of possible legal measures will be given at the seminar.*

### **Introduction and Presentation**

My gratitude to the Ambassador of Sweden to the Holy See Mr. Lars-Hjalmar Wide for inviting me to attend this important seminar, that aims at highlighting the huge phenomenon of trafficking and exploitation of children in many different ways and in many parts of the world, Italy included. I am aware that children nowadays have become a special target for traffickers because they can very easily be enslaved and used mainly for cheap labour, begging, removal of organs, recruited as soldiers, but moreover trafficked for sexual exploitation and sexual tourism. I will therefore share the experience of many years of commitment in this ministry mainly in networking with other women religious dealing in Countries of origin, transit and destination. Nuns are mainly concerned about preventing the exodus of young people towards a "promised land" but, moreover, we are very much involved in rescuing victims from the streets and nightclubs to reintegrate them into society and in their family .

A special thanks goes to **HM Queen Silvia of Sweden** for Her presence that means Her great concern for the life of millions of children who are the present and future of mankind. Unfortunately they have been deprived of their youth, their joy, their dreams, their hope and desire for a world free of slavery and exploitation.

### **A new missionary ministry**

Being a missionary and having worked in Africa for 24 years I am aware of the many problems and difficulties faced by young children, deprived of proper education because of poverty, large families and lack of opportunities for a bright future. They can easily become pray of traffickers searching for victims to meet the demand of an opulent western society where, with money, even a body of a child can be bought and used as a toy to satisfy the greed for power, possession and pleasure of millions of consumers.

Since 1993 when I started working in Turin on a Caritas drop-in-centre for migrant women I met and started rescuing hundreds of young girls from Nigeria and from Eastern European Countries by offering them shelters and opportunities for a different life. Since then I encountered thousands of such very young girls, each one with a different story of humiliation and exploitation. It is in that big and industrialized city that I came to know the world of the night and of the street where at that time more than 3000 young women were living, working and often dying on the streets. The girls from Albania and Romania were very young and very confused, therefore it was difficult to rescue them because they were controlled by their pimps at sight. Nigerians instead were controlled by Nigerian women tightening them psychologically through Voodoo rituals performed before travelling to Italy that played a great mental force and fear on them. Moreover they had to stand along the roadside like statues of exotic ebano for long hours almost naked and in dehumanized conditions during the day but mainly during the night facing darkness and cold, mistreatment, violence and even killing. They are sought by thousands of consumers of easy sex and judged and despised by well off people that look upon them with indifference. Julie a 18 years Nigerian girl told me that in one night she had 13 clients. How can you recuperate a young girl with such an horrible experience?

**Women rescuing trafficked women and children:** In the year 2000, I moved to Rome to organize an office at the main quarters of the Italian Women Religious Conference to coordinate the service and ministry of several congregations that, with courage and vision for a new healing ministry, opened the “holy doors” of their convents to shelter hundreds of young victims rescued from the streets, helping them to heal the traumatic experienced of forced prostitution and start a new life.

At present, 250 sisters - belonging to 80 congregations - work in 110 projects in Italy, often in collaboration with Caritas, other public or private bodies, volunteers and associations. Several hundred victims, from various different countries, are at the moment present in our shelters.

**Women religious are playing a critical and important role in the following ministries to trafficking victims which include:**

- **Outreach Units**, as a first contact with the victims on the streets;
- **Drop-in Centres**, identifying solutions for women in search of help;
- **Safe Communities or Shelters** for programs of social reintegration[1];
- **Restoring legal status** through the acquisition of legal documents[2];
- **Collaboration with Embassies** to obtain necessary identification documents[3];
- **Professional preparation** through language, skills and job training;
- **Psychological and spiritual aid** to help survivors rediscover their cultural roots and faith, to regain their self-esteem and heal the wounds of their experience;
- **Weekly visits to the Identification and Expulsion Centre in Rome:** For more than a decade, 60 religious sisters from 27 different countries, belonging to 28 religious congregations, have offered a healing ministry of mercy and comfort through spiritual, religious and pastoral assistance, as well as psychological and moral support to women arrested on the streets because they have been found in Italy with no legal documents. I remember Rita brought to Italy at the age of 15 years by her three steps sisters, rescued by police men from the streets and brought to the Center of identification and expulsion of Ponte Galeria because she had no proper documents. Being a minor we took her out and she gave us the account that in 15 months she gained to her steps sisters 55.000 euro. How many times was she used and abused?
- **Voluntary Repatriation and Financial Social Integration Project:** The latest initiative is to assist in the repatriation of women – mainly women with children – who request to return to their home countries and rebuild their lives. Since September 2013, our network of nuns has assisted 13 women with several children born in Italy, and many others in Nigeria. To be able to operate efficiently for this unique project a new association: “Slaves no more” was established in 2013. Women who want to return home in a dignify manner are offered a flight ticket and a specific budget for a personal and reintegration working project. This is done in connection and cooperation with the local Sisters since our greatest strength and key to success is “networking”, not in competition but in communion with the same vision, aim and objectives. (Mercy, the latest person rescued)

**A Call for Action: Joining the Fight Against Trafficking in Human Beings mainly to prevent trafficking and slavery of children as well as rescuing them and giving them back their stolen dignity and youth.**

**According to their varying positions and specific roles we call upon:**

Ø **The Global Economic Complex** to develop a strong economic system to offer women and children opportunities for a better life without being forced to be trafficked from poor countries mainly to sell their body;

Ø **The States** with proper legislation to suppress prostitution, punish trafficking in people and protect, legalize and reintegrate victim, mainly children;

Ø **The Global Family** to legally and strongly press for effective measures against demand, to rescue men and safeguard the family values of fidelity, love and unity;

Ø **The Church** with its Christian vision of sexuality and man-woman relationships to safeguard and promote the dignity of every woman created in God’s image;

Ø **The Schools** by forming and informing to the right values based on mutual respect and dignity;

Ø **The Media** in projecting a complete, balanced and accurate image of women that restores them to their full human value, presenting them as subjects and not as mere objects to be bought and sold.

**Conclusion**

In accordance with the new demands of a world constantly changing and in search of justice, solidarity, dignity and respect for the rights of every person, especially the weak and the vulnerable, women and children, we are each called to offer our contribution. Only by working together can we find success in our ministry to break the invisible global chain of human trafficking, and give new hope to broken and exploited women, men and children. Together, with all members of Christian communities and people of good will, we need to respond in a concrete and clear way to the question:

***"Who is my neighbour?" The answer cannot but be, "Go and do the same!"***

***"We are all neighbours. We are all brothers and sisters and not slaves"***

**Thank you for your attention and your concern!**

*Sister Eugenia Bonetti, mc*  
*USMI Counter Trafficking Office*  
*President of "Slaves No More" Association*  
*Via Zanardelli, 32- Rome – 00186*  
*Tel. +39 06 68400555 - +39 3391934538*  
***tratta@usminazionale.it / ebonettimc@pcn.net***  
***www.slavesnomore.it***

[1] There are 80 family houses run by nuns for programmes of human, social and legal reintegration; many shelters also welcome mothers with children or pregnant women to protect them and safeguard the gift of a new life.

[2] Protection and rehabilitation of victims of human trafficking has been implemented legally in Italy since July 25, 1998, through the application of a special residence permit given for social protection and reintegration under a Legislative Immigration Decree No. 286. With this legislation, Italy is a pioneer among European countries that set up a special program to issue a residence permit aiming at recognizing and supporting victims of exploitation, as well as cracking down on trafficking and traffickers. Since Article 18 came into force in 1998 about 6,000 residence permits were obtained by women living in our shelters.

[3] Since the beginning of our collaboration with the sector Trade in Human Beings, more than 4.000 passports have been issued by the Nigerian Embassy to comply with the procedure of residence permits according to the Italian legislation.