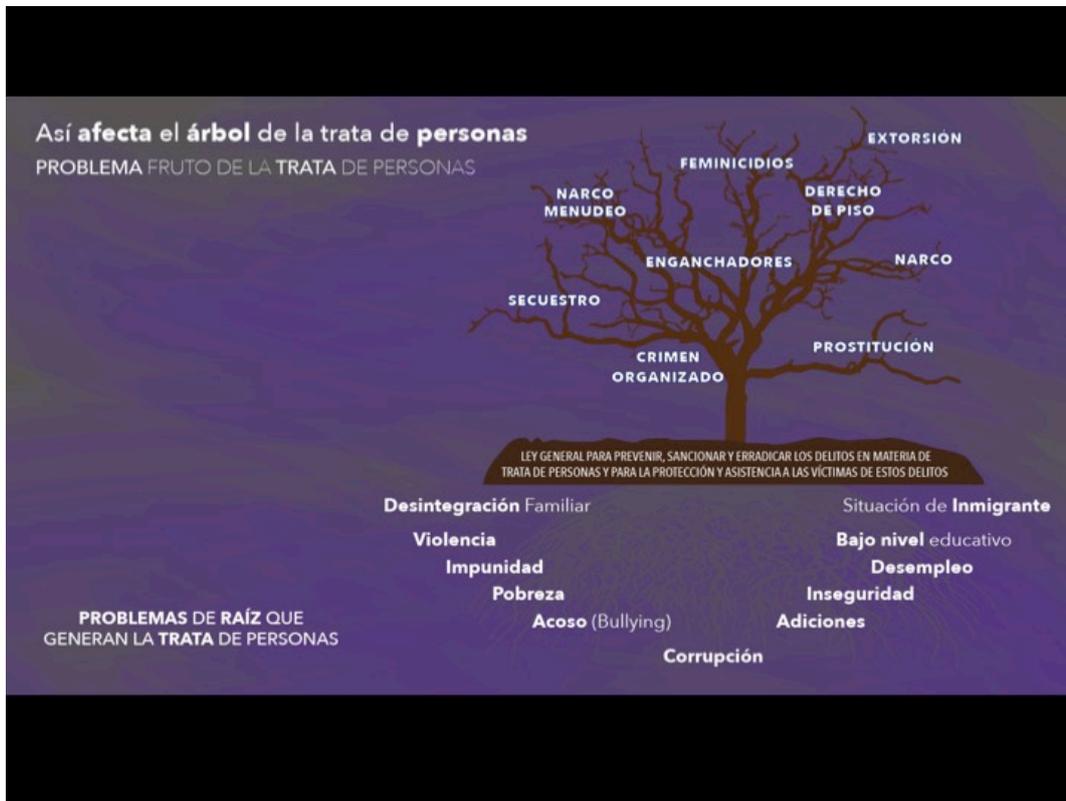




## El perverso círculo de las víctimas de trata de personas



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 Sin Trata, Mexico City

Young People Against Prostitution and Human Trafficking:  
 The Greatest Violence Against Human Beings  
 Casina Pio IV  
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Thank you, it is a great honor to be here with you.

I would like us to start by trying to walk a mile in someone else's shoes. I have a short video that I would like to show you.

[VIDEO]

I arrived at this foundation when I was rescued. I arrived there and I went through a recovery period. My subject today is the perverse circle of trafficking victims. I do not know if you can imagine yourself in the shoes of a victim or survivor, but I would like to show you what all those who have been through this... I would like to show you the tree of trafficking. This is it. These are the fruits of human trafficking, and here you see the roots – how trafficking is born, how it is generated. My situation as a victim was one in which I came from a broken family. As a child, I lived in a family in which there was a lot of violence. My Mom would come home and hit us a lot. The roots include impunity, poverty... we hardly had any money, my mother worked as a housekeeper in other people's homes. I experienced a lot of bullying. I was the smallest in my family and I was bullied by my brothers who treated us like garbage. We can smile about these things now and we realize that a long time has gone by. However, these things can really harm you. There was corruption as well. Corruption of the police, of the authorities who pretended to help us but caused even more harm. Addiction, insecurity, unemployment, poor education, or being an immigrant. These are the roots.

This is the soil in which trafficking flourishes. There can be different things that happen, for instance kidnapping, organized crime, prostitution, drugs, hookers, extortion, femicide... and other things.

I would like to talk about my personal story. I was forced into prostitution at the age of 12. As I mentioned, I experienced abuse in relationships from a very early age. My mother threw me out of our house. I met someone who gave me some love, some understanding, who listened to me. That is what I really wanted and needed and longed for: someone who would listen to me. But then what happened when I was so desperate and needed so badly someone who would listen to me and needed so much to have someone hug me, love me, give me a kiss, was that I decided that I would run away with someone else who would care for me and love me. So I had this really pretty picture and I was told by this person that I was going to have a family. He would say, "Come here, I want to hug you" and all these lovely sweet things. He said he wanted to marry me and have children and I thought, "Wow, what a good father he would be". A father is someone who loves you and respects you. I lived with him for three months and I lived well. He gave me a house, he dressed me, he gave me affection. And then he said, "You know, you have to help me". I said, "Of course I will help you!" I knew how to do a lot of things because my mother had taught us right from the beginning to be independent. He told me I had to start working. He took some photographs and made me a fake voter's ID. I was only 12 but the next day I had a voter's ID. I was twelve and he turned me into an eighteen-year-old.

When I started working, or rather, when they started exploiting me, I was in Guadalajara, Mexico. It is disgusting when a man touches you for the first time. You feel empty, dirty, you feel no one loves you. They say they love you and then they start using you and then they discard you. They all use you in the same way. I wanted to die then. I felt filthy. They started saying that if I didn't do what they wanted me to do, they were going to kill my family. And we all know that we would give anything for our family. Even though we have been abused and hurt by our family, we still cannot help caring for them. And so when they said, "We'll kill your Mother", for this is what they would put me through, I was always threatened that they would kill my mother if I didn't do what they said. They would point a gun to my head. And that is what kept me there, my family, working 24 hours a day. That is what forced me to stay. Do you know what happens when you stand on the street in a miniskirt and high heels? Every man, every woman who walks by and sees you judges you and makes you feel discriminated. They see you wearing a little skirt and they say, "You are a..." and they use a very vulgar word, or "You are a ...", another vulgar word. And you do not hear anyone say anything nice, they just discriminate against you because they do not know your past, they do not know why you are there. Many people think they know what you are just because you're wearing high heels and a miniskirt.

They made me another fake ID. They gave me another birthdate and at 15 they turned me into a 22-year-old. They would beat me every day with cables, with sticks, and they even burned my private parts. I had to suffer through all of this. I had to have an abortion when I was expecting twins because they said the pregnancy would ruin my body. I'm overweight now but I feel fine.

One of the worst things is that they make you work when you are pregnant. You have a child in your tummy and you know that you will give birth to a child who may smile at you one day... and I was still made to work at eight months pregnant. One month after the birth they took the child away and started threatening me with what they would do to her. She's a little girl now, she's 7 years old.

But then a little angel came by. That angel was a client. He would pay not to have sex with me, but just to talk to me. He became a close friend, because of the 42,300 people who used me over those four years, because that's more or less how many they were, he was the first one who did not see me as an object to be thrown away after using it for five minutes. For the almost two years in which he was with me as a client he would say, "Don't you have a dream? Don't you have a family? Why are you here? Why are you still working? You're so young. You should have dreams, and principles, and hopes". And I would say, "No, I haven't. Do what it is you want to do with me or you'd better leave". But he insisted, he endured. And he was so inspired by the fact that he would pull me out of there that he eventually did it. And here I am now. Six years have passed and I am so well.

That man rescued me. I'll show you him in a bit. This was my face when I arrived at the Foundation. I despised everyone. I was not the only girl there, there were many others, even 12-year-olds. So far since yesterday we've only been talking about women, but no, now we're talking about girls and boys. They make boys prostitute themselves too. You do not know how ugly it is to see a little boy... I have brothers and sisters. You cannot imagine how awful it is to see how the little boys are raped. If it hurts us when they hurt us, imagine what it's like for these children. I had a boyfriend at the time, and I would beat him up. I was full of hatred. When I arrived I hated everyone. I would hit the walls in the shelter. I even hit Rosi the first time I met her. They had to put up with me – well, for two years maybe. Life, to me, seemed like hell, real hell, because first they use you, they call you "my love", but their love meant, "I'm going to beat you, I'm going to turn you into a prostitute". And tomorrow, no matter how you are feeling, it's going to be the same. I was never allowed any rest, not one minute. When I was sick, I had to continue working. When I had my period I still had to continue working. We had to use a sponge inside and continue working. I couldn't catch the flu, or anything... Can you imagine what that means?

I used to be a victim of trafficking, an object that was used and thrown away. Every day was the same. Every minute, every instant was the same. I wasn't myself. I didn't want to live, life was black and empty. That was before; it is not like that now. Imagine it happening to one of your sisters or family members. How would you feel? Just think about it

Make your life a dream and make your dream a reality. It was a dream to arrive in a place like this today, and to return to be able to smile again. If I can smile again it is because of people like you here. What I have heard in the last two days is really impressive. I had never listened to so many people helping other people without even knowing them. You get involved, you are great, because the risk that we run as activists, as civil society associations, etc, is that we risk our lives. If they find out that you are trying to help a victim of trafficking, you risk your life. Despite everything that happens to us, we continue along this path. And I chose this path, despite the family I have, my two children, my husband who supports me, this is the decision that I have taken today: to continue to help other victims of human trafficking.

This is me one day: I will make the cover of Forbes magazine. Rosi was named one of the 50 most powerful women in Mexico in 2014. And I'm going to take her place! What do you think about that?

It's enough to be a little adventurous to be satisfied in this life, because thank God nothing happens like we wished, hoped for or planned.

That's me, on my wedding day, with my second mother. She was the first to look at me, to put up with me – her hair turned gray because of me, now she has to dye it – but there she was! And this is my father. He was very important for me. I cried earlier on when I remembered him, because thanks to this man, thanks to this great man... It took a lot of courage to stay with us, to put up with us, to cope with us shouting that we didn't want to eat, we didn't want to study... Despite all of this he was there. There were fifteen of us, and he treated the fifteen of us the same. He would buy us all the same things. There were twenty-four of us and he took us all to Six Flags amusement park. Yes, he even took us on vacation. He really put up with us. I cannot tell you everything because I am running out of time, but this man was really a great man. He was a father to us all. He taught us how to study, he taught us to smile, he taught us to rely on ourselves, he taught us to work, to fight for what we believed in, what we wanted.

Another of my dreams was for my Mom to be there on my wedding day. My mother is the woman in white you see in the photo. She is the one who hit me and beat me up, but we have to give everyone a second chance in life, and I gave my mother this second chance. We had to put all of this behind us to come together as a real family. This family that was so broken, so marginalized. I had to go through all of this for my family to come together.

That good little man in black you see there is my husband. I love him infinitely. This is my family. My youngest daughter is not in the picture. The little girl you see here is the result of what happened to me. I love her. The worst happened to her as well. I lost track of her for a year when they took her away from me. I didn't know whether she slept, I didn't know where she was. When they gave her back to me she had a burn on her face. I cannot tell you how I felt. She gave me so much courage. I said to myself, you either go on or you won't know what will happen to you. I am here today because of her, she taught me so much. Although we have spent so much time apart, because she has only been with me for two years and she is 7 years old, so we lost five years of our lives, but we have tried to be like a family, a real family. I learn from her every day and she learns from me.

It is perverse to keep quiet. We always see people and don't say anything. When we see someone on a street corner or in a car, or wearing a miniskirts and high heels, we usually walk by without looking. What happened to her? Who knows. Many of us died. Many of us are simply a number in a newspaper, one extra number. Do you remember who she was? Of course you don't. Do you know who she is? Do you know anything about her family? Her name? That was my experience, and this is the angel who helped me leave that world. This is the great man. He was brave enough to say that I was worth something as a woman, not as an object. This man made a deal with my trafficker for me to be able to go out for breakfast with him, to go out to eat with him, to bring me toys, gifts, chocolates. And you don't know how much money he had to pay to be able to spend time with me and make me feel better.

"Evil advances when those who know how to do good do not do anything" (Martin Luther King). Think about it. Am I right or not?

This is the number to call to report a case in Mexico: 01 800 5533000. In Mexico you can use this phone number, but maybe we could set up an international number, why not?

My name is Karla Jacinto Romero, my Twitter account is @ClaudiaUnidas and I am here to help you.