



Empowering the Survivors of the Crime of Trafficking and What it Means

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Mexico

Young People Against Prostitution and Human Trafficking:

The Greatest Violence Against Human Beings

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First and foremost I would like to thank Alicia, Antonia and Gabriella – thank you to all those who made it possible for us to be here today for a common objective and for a purpose that we know we will achieve outside of here.

There is a video I wanted to show you.

“Thanks to the Reintegra Foundation I am fulfilling one of my dreams: I am studying law because I know that I can help to defend a lot of victims who have survived the crime of trafficking. The Foundation started to help me in order for me to continue fulfilling my dreams, and be part of society again. I am training for a marathon because we are promoting the fight against human trafficking and I am supporting it. For every kilometer I run I am going to raise a certain amount of money to help the Reintegra Foundation and the Foundation called *Camino a Casa*”.

“Girls come to this Foundation as children and go through a healing process. When they have to leave because they grow older, the Reintegra Foundation provides support and allows them to pursue their plan for life.

The Reintegra Foundation today has several university faculties. The success of Reintegra lies in being able to support these people and help them become free, self-ensured, happy, fulfilled. We have cases of girls who studied in the preparatory school who have gone on to study at university. One young woman is studying business administration in a nursing school, one is studying law – the plan obviously depends on each person and on her dreams. We are responsible for giving a shape and a meaning to that dream.

Reintegra Foundation and Camino a Casa Foundation are two of the only homes and shelters.”

“Thanks to them I’m going to have a better life, I’m going to study astronomy.”

“I’m going to go to university and I’m going to study nursing because I like working.”

“Thank God I finished secondary school and I’m studying English at the moment, to go on to university.”

“For me, Reintegra Foundation has become like my home, like my family, they are supporting me so that I can go back to society and continue my studies so that in the future I’ll be able to have a business, a professional job and continue to live my life as a normal person. I’m very grateful to the Reintegra Foundation and to all those who work here. They are my family.”

I think that looking at the video will help us understand what this is all about. As Alicia said before, my name is Madai, I am the Honorary President of Reintegra Foundation, but I am also a survivor of the crime of human trafficking. I would like to talk to you about the empowerment of each survivor.

Rather than talking about survivors, I think that the appropriate terms is “super-survivors”. Who is a survivor? A survivor is a person who, in spite of everything she has had to go through – in this case we are talking about human trafficking – has been able to recover thanks to a demanding, difficult process. There is a whole process that allows the survivor to recognize that those are events of the past and consider them as an opportunity to become stronger, to struggle, to fight, to make her dreams come true.

What do we need to do in order to make this happen and in order for a person to become a true survivor? First, the person needs to be empowered. Throughout the day we have repeatedly talked about the concept of empowerment. Empowering means giving power to each person by highlighting their individual rights, which they received at birth. These rights belong to every human person from the day they were born. How do we do this? We generate tools that will enable these individuals to take advantage of each opportunity so that they can develop. We do this by defining a plan of action, by looking at the emotional aspects. These emotional aspects are very closely connected with the psychological parts of the person. It is not a difficult thing to do, but it is complicated to address that part of a person. I am saying this because when a victim is rescued, when she is freed of those chains, she comes to us in great pain. It is a bit complicated because out there in the world that is full of evil we are told that we are worthless, that we have no value, that we are like a commodity. At a personal level I was told this – but not just me, each of the girls we care for. This is exactly what they made us feel like – we were made to feel like waste, garbage, like a commodity, an object that is good only to the traffickers and the traffickers' network, because we generate money for these people. This was what we were made to believe at one point in our life. Now, of course, things have changed.

The social aspects are important too, because sometimes you lose... I am sorry, I do not know how to explain this... what happens is that we lose control over our own lives. As I said earlier, survivors have the power to control their own lives, thanks to empowerment, and generally that is the way it happened, each one of us who is here today has gone through this. For myself and for those of us who are with me and who are going to have the opportunity to address you, being here with you today is part of this whole empowerment process, because it makes us feel important, it makes us feel we are worth a lot, and that as persons and as human beings we deserve the same opportunities as the rest of us. Here, instead of "from victim to survivor", I would say "from victim to super-survivor" because the survivors are still in this phase, maybe they are still afraid, and maybe there are circumstances that are not allowing them to take that extra step. We were talking about that earlier, when we said that a survivor is still in the midst of it, she is still wounded and she is still trying to find a way out with the help that we have been giving her in order to heal those wounds and go through this whole process. It is a healing process after all, and it is a very long one: you do not wake up one day and say, "I'm through with it". A survivor is someone who is actually able to take control of her life. Once again, I would say that someone who has been able to gain full control over her life is a super-survivor of her life.

There are survivors who do not consider themselves victims. Someone spoke about this earlier, Monsignor Sánchez I think, and it is true, because in certain circumstances, for instance, when names are reported, some women do not want to report what has been happening, what they are going through. Why? Because they are afraid and because sometimes they just do not realize that they are victims of this crime, because they are being tricked. In my case, I fell in love. I knew this man was a bad guy, but above and beyond that I was very afraid, because I was threatened along with my family, and in the place where I was, I was sort of protected by everyone in Mexico. I lived there for a long time in a state of slavery, and I lived in one of the most famous streets of Mexico City, it is called Sullivan. There, the person who was in charge of me was a woman, a pimp. She was well known as the pimp of Sullivan Street. I am not afraid, but I am very mistrustful of this person. I hope and want to make sure that this person does not come out of jail because I was brave enough to report her and she was incarcerated with her son and with the trafficker. Now I am very wary because I know that many of these people have connections with politicians, thus it is a little risky to be in our position, because we just do not know what can happen, what they can do.

Obviously, I would like to ask you all for your support, because I know that together we can do many things and I know that all these people who have cheated us and deceived us really have to pay the price for that. I want to make sure that they will not get out of the place in which they are incarcerated because, from my point of view, they should never come out. They really, literally, need to pay for the damage they have done to others. A human being should never damage another human being, because at the end of the day we can all feel that. You might wonder why I decided to show you a picture of these mirrors. I did it because many victims do not recognize themselves entirely, they cannot look at their past and at their present and they cannot imagine possibilities for the future. My work is to help these survivors re-build this vision. Our purpose is to support them so that they can take on board their condition as victims and become empowered, so that in the future they can see themselves as super-survivors.

Let me further elaborate on the concept of empowerment. We provide them with tools like education. I think you were able to see in the video how each one of these survivors has dreams – different dreams depending on the person but, at the end of the day, they do have dreams. Sometimes they put them aside. When I was taken I was 19 years old. I was a student at the time; I was studying psycho-pedagogy at university. When they took me away my dreams were crushed, literally. It was horrible. Afterwards it took a long time for me to go back to those dreams. I would keep saying to myself 'How am I possibly going to do it, how can I achieve

it?' But I did it in the end! I think that what is important are those survivors who really need our aid today, they need a hand from all of us here.