

COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Church and Law Enforcement in Partnership

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Being Aware, Being Convinced, Being Compassionate and Being Collaborative
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I would like this afternoon to say a few words about how I have become more aware of the tragedy of human trafficking on the one hand but also become more committed to doing what I can to eliminate it on the other. I will summarize that journey in four simple phrases: being aware, being convinced, being compassionate and being collaborative.

First Being Aware. About three years ago the Catholic Church in England and Wales in partnership with the Metropolitan Police held a conference on human trafficking in London. About fifty people attended - representing different dioceses and religious orders and different organizations that were involved in combating human trafficking. At the conference Inspector Kevin Hyland gave a presentation on the extent of human trafficking in the U.K. giving two or three examples from his own experience. After the conference he was contacted by a representative from the Embassy of the Philippines in London who told him that she and her colleagues in the Embassy were aware of about sixty young Filipino women who had been trafficked or exploited in the U.K. by one criminal group. That for me was a very powerful wake up call. Whilst I was aware that human trafficking was a serious problem that incident helped me realise the extent that human trafficking was taking place in our cities and in our communities. Secondly, it helped me to realise the important role the Church could play in giving people the confidence and the courage to go to and trust the law enforcement agencies especially when the victims were undocumented or irregular migrants. So the first step for me (and indeed for all of us) is to become more aware of the extent of human trafficking, more aware of the terrible suffering caused by human trafficking and more aware that it may well be happening in our city and in our diocese, in our town or in our parish.

Second Being Convinced. I am sure all of us here this afternoon are totally convinced about the importance of responding to the scourge of human trafficking in the world today or are we? In his recent letter Pope Francis in forceful language asks "Where is your brother and sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labour? Let us not look the other way." Certainly for us bishops we could not get clearer or stronger leadership as to why we should be convinced of the importance of ensuring that working to combat human trafficking must be a priority for our mission and our work for the common good. However, it is my experience that in many places there is still denial about the reality and extent of human trafficking.

Third Being Compassionate. Last September I had the opportunity of visiting Nigeria and the privilege of seeing how the Church and in particular the religious orders of women were responding to the victims and survivors of human trafficking. It was truly inspiring to hear the stories of the courage of the sisters as they go out often to very dangerous places and the compassion of the sisters as they care for the victims and survivors. Tomorrow you will hear about the tremendous work that they are doing. Today all I want to do is to acknowledge the contribution being made by the religious congregations of sisters and indeed many other organizations. Their contribution deserves acknowledgement from both governments and the Church. Your presence as religious with and your care for those who suffer the most is a tremendous witness to the compassion of Christ in the world today.

Finally Being Collaborative. One of the lessons that I certainly have learnt in the last two years is that the only way we can confront the scourge of human trafficking and slavery in the world today is by working together. It is important that Church organizations work with Law Enforcement Agencies and it is important that statutory bodies work with voluntary bodies. The Catholic Church with its world wide structure of Episcopal Conferences and its enormous network of charitable agencies spread throughout Asia, Africa, Australia, Latin America, Eastern and Western is particularly well placed to play a key role in helping to build an effective global network

to combat human trafficking. This is a journey we – the Catholic bishops in England and Wales - have been called to make if we are to respond as effectively as we can to those who have suffered. This conference is about creating the good will and establishing the networks to enable this to happen everywhere.

In conclusion, I thank you all for coming and permit me to finish with the inspiring story of a courageous woman called Josephine Bakhita who at the age of nine was kidnapped and sold and subsequently re-sold into slavery several times in her native Sudan. She suffered terribly at the hands of her kidnappers so much so that she forgot her birth name. Her kidnappers gave her the name 'Bakhita' which means 'Fortunate'. Her final owner – the Italian Consul – brought her to Italy where she was entrusted to the care of the Canossian Sisters in Venice. It was there she came to know and experience God's love. She became a Catholic in 1890 and made her final profession in the order in 1896. For the next fifty years she led a life of simplicity, prayer and service (serving as the doorkeeper in the convent) always showing kindness to everyone especially the children in the street. In her final years she suffered from sickness and the haunting memories of the beatings and flogging she received whilst in slavery. She died in 1947 and was canonized as a saint in October 2000. Her suffering is a reminder of the enduring tragedy of human slavery: her courage and sanctity a reminder of the enduring power the human spirit and indeed of God's grace.

St. Josephine Bakita – Pray for us.

