

Symposium at the Vatican “Young people against prostitution and human trafficking”

Mary Ward Loreto has been honoured to participate at the symposium “Young people against prostitution and human trafficking”, held in Vatican on 15th and 16th of November, among young people from all over the world committed in combating the “modern slavery” human trafficking, prostitution and exploitation.



Irena Kraja represented MWL, as an observer. She is the Assistant Manager of Mary Ward’s Women Project, an anti-trafficking prevention project working with 800 women in the rural and informal regions of Albania. This project has a partnership with shelters for trafficked victims in the UK whose highest number of victims, come from Albania. She is also a social psychologist and counsels victims from Albania, online through Skype, to support the key workers in the UK who do not understand the language. It is proving to be a very effective way of supporting victims across borders.

Young people could share their experiences while working on prevention of all kinds of human trafficking and rehabilitation of survived victims. They highlighted the issues in their countries, filling up the whole picture of human trafficking. Emphasis is put on requiring more help from governments to fight this crime, enforcing the laws, and on the collaboration with the statutory services.

Victims of slavery are mostly vulnerable women, girls and children, who are trafficked for sex trade, begging, and forced labour. The inputs reflected a similarity in the manner in which young women were recruited for the sex trade, such as promises for marriages and better life conditions, and promises for job opportunities. Similarities are also found in the attitude of society in relation to the victims, who are blamed for their situation. According to this, it was explained by the MWL representative in this symposium, that in Albania this is an issue because many families abandon their daughters who became victims of trafficking, because of pride and shame reflected on them by society.

Olivia Conroy from UK, who visited Albania and Mary Ward’s Women project, on behalf of RENATE, produce a report on specific causes, effects and consequences of human trafficking in Albania, explaining that especially young women, with no real independence, get easily manipulated by the traffickers with their false promises, and also because of the lack of support, by the state, for women

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and children in poverty. This leads to a loss of hope and a rapid deterioration in the situation. She highlighted also the Roma people's life conditions, and their risk to human trafficking. She proposed that better security, networking and equal opportunities are some of the main solutions to this problem.

Elvis Popaj, from "Different and equal" in Albania gave his recommendations to fight trafficking by identifying dysfunctional families, train the staff who are working on this issue, mapping the areas where trafficking is more frequent, and raising awareness in the community.

Pope Francis joined the symposium and appealed to the youth, encouraging them to collaborate and fight against modern slavery. Most of the participants had the opportunity to meet him and to capture memories with their cameras. It is going to be a good memory for MWL too.



With much interest was the following discussion on prostitution. It was said that even when it is a personal choice, it must not be considered as a business, human bodies must not be commercialised. Building human values is very important.

Survived victims of human trafficking shared their stories, talking sincerely from the depth of their hearts. Their moving stories and their good will to help other girls, inspired and motivated all of the participants to vigorously go ahead and become active defenders of human rights.

An important moment was the signing of the International Declaration of young people against Prostitution and Human Trafficking.

<http://www.news.va/en/news/young-activists-issue-declaration-against-human-tr>

A network is established with the participants who shared their contacts and information related to the relevant organizations or institutions they work for, and it ended up with a close group on Facebook where we can be in touch with each other, share and support each's work.

We are grateful to the organizers of this symposium: Pontifical Academy for Science; Vínculos en Red; the interreligious anti-trafficking foundation "Global Freedom Network" and RENATE who helped to fund this enterprise for six young people.

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