

Counter Trafficking in Persons Office: LCCL/SACBC

Human Trafficking Conference. 9-12 April, 2013

To mark 5 years since its inception, the Counter Trafficking in Persons Office of the LCCL/SACBC held a human trafficking Conference at Good Shepherd Retreat Centre, Hartbeespoort, from 9 – 12 April. One of its main purposes was to bring together those who had been work-shopped by CTIP over the years in order that we update ourselves re human trafficking and deliberate a way forward for another 5 years. The Conference also provided a platform for participants to share on all the work done by them in the fight against human trafficking. Among the 47 participants were 15 religious sisters – (from South Africa, Lesotho, Zambia, Botswana, Nigeria); 2 priests: Fr Matt Gormley and Fr Hermes Paononga who had conducted numerous 2-3 day workshops on human trafficking in the Eastern Cape; 15 police from the Northern Cape who have done much education on human trafficking at border posts. Talks by the various speakers which included invited guests: Ms Kamini Reddy and Mr Luvuyo Mfaku from the NPA; Mr Johan Claassen from the US Embassy and Diane Hall from National Freedom Network, were very informative and well appreciated.

Human trafficking is regarded as the third most lucrative underground ‘business’ in the world, drugs and arms being the other two. Victims from sub-Saharan Africa account for a large share of the victims detected in Western and Central Europe. South Africa has been identified as the main destination point for human trafficking within the SADC region. The actual extent to which human trafficking is flourishing is unknown. We have no national statistics on the number of people being trafficked. As there is no legislation yet and offenders are charged under other related crimes. Victims of trafficking have been reported to be exploited largely for domestic servitude, agriculture, prostitution and muti purposes. The globalised commercial sex industry has greatly expanded. Traffickers capitalise on the demand for a constant supply of women and children in the industry. East Asian victims are regularly being detected in relatively large numbers here in South Africa, many of them Thai nationals rescued from strip clubs and the like.

Whether human trafficking is on the increase or whether it is only now we are recognising it for what it is- is difficult to determine. Participants reporting at the Conference, especially from Lesotho, Swaziland and Zambia, noted how very poor parents sell their children to traffickers thinking their children are going to be well educated and looked after.

During the Conference we had the Launch of the “**TRUCKERS AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING**” campaign to which a number of guests were invited. We congratulate **FRUIT SPOT** for being the first trucking company to engage in the campaign. During the ceremony both driver and the huge truck were blessed. Various speakers during the Conference had pointed out that truckers can play a significant role in safeguarding victims and potential victims of trafficking in the transportation phase simply by reporting offenders offering underage girls to them encountered at truck stops.

The role of the Church in the pastoral care of truck drivers who face long and hazardous journeys was emphasized. Pope Benedict XVI had already pointed out that Africa has become a continent where millions of people are either willingly or unwillingly daily on the move thus transforming African roads and streets into privileged places of evangelization and education. Therefore, our Church should be seen as **the Church on the Move**.

The presence and help of Mr Rob Riedlinger of Mariannhill Press as well as the 15 Police units who man the borders of the Northern Cape was highly appreciated by all present as a source of strength in our fight against Human Trafficking. Having representatives from different African countries and some agencies, such as the National Prosecution Authority, US Embassy and National Freedom Network, it became obvious that networking is central to success in the fight against this hydra-headed evil of our time.

To further our “ Truckers Against Human Trafficking” campaign , members committed themselves to targeting at least one trucking company in the near future. The second launch of “Truckers Against Human Trafficking” is being planned by our police unit and likely to be in Aliwal North towards the end of May.

Grateful thanks to participants, invited guests, partners and sponsors.

Sr Melanie O’ Connor

Coordinator: Counter Trafficking in Persons Office (CTIP)

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