

## CONGRESS OF RELIGIOUS AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

VATICAN CITY, 12 JUN 2009 (VIS) - In the Holy See Press Office this morning, a press conference was held to present a forthcoming congress on the theme: "Female Religious in Network against Trafficking in Persons". The event, due to be held in Rome from 15 to 18 June, has been organised by the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) and by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

Participating in today's press conference were Fr. Eusebio Hernandez Sola O.A.R., bureau chief at the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life; Sr. Victoria Gonzales de Castejon R.S.C.J., secretary general of the UISG; Carmela Godeau, vice head of mission of the IOM; Sr. Bernadette Sangma F.M.A., and Stefano Volpicelli of the IOM.

"The problem of human trafficking represents a new form of slavery of the twenty-first century, one that offends the dignity and freedom of many women and minors, but also of youths and adult men, most of them from poor countries" said Fr. Hernandez Sola. "These new forms of poverty remind us that religious life is, by vocation, called to play a prophetic role in society and the Church today. A new conception of charity must carry consecrated life to the new frontiers of evangelisation, and to the new forms of poverty, among the most serious of which is the loss of personal dignity".

For her part, Sr. Bernadette Sangma explained that awareness about the phenomenon of human trafficking has increased to such an extent over the last few years that "some congregations ... have adopted the struggle against trafficking as part of their capitular deliberations, making it an obligatory mandate for members of their congregation. This has also included a number of male orders".

"Given the complexity of the factors involved in human trafficking, networking in this field is not an option but a necessity if we hope to make any kind of strategic commitment. The criminal bands that prey on women and children are highly organised and linked to one another, from one part of the world to the other. Only through a networking strategy which includes the victims' countries of origin, of transit and of destination, will it be possible to implement measures to prevent the weakest and most vulnerable people from becoming human merchandise".

Sr. Victoria Gonzales de Castejon noted how, for the religious of the UISG, the last six years of collaboration with the IOM have provided "an opportunity to put the intentions of the Union into real effect, and to increase the scope of our actions aimed at contrasting human trafficking. ... What emerges clearly from the work that has been achieved is the richness and complementarity in exchanges and collaboration between two organisations that represent public and the private aspects - lay people and female religious - in the common cause of defending the lives of people who live in situations of poverty and marginalisation".

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