

## Education Chips Away at Human Trafficking

Women Religious in Thailand Share Success Stories

By Mirko Testa

ROME, JULY 10, 2008 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The education of would-be victims is one of the keys to putting an end to human trafficking, affirm women religious working against this crime in Thailand.

Thailand is again at the Tier 2 level in this year's U.S. State Department Trafficking in Persons Report, released last month. Tier 2 is assigned to those governments that are "making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance" with the minimum requirements to eliminate human trafficking.

The Southeast Asian nation passed a tougher law against the practice this year -- though enforcing it despite corruption problems among the police is expected to continue to be a problem.

ZENIT spoke with three women religious who are chipping away at the issue from a different side: preventing would-be victims from falling into this modern form of slavery.

They say the key is education.

Sister Anurak Chaiyaphuek, of the Religious of the Good Shepherd, said that women religious in Thailand "have been making untiring efforts to prevent [...] children from falling into an abyss of abuse by carrying out our mission among them."

"What we have done so far is founding schools based on national compulsory education in remote areas or up high on the mountains and opening centers for small children and students who have accomplished compulsory education to pave ways for their further studies in the government's public schools in the cities," she explained. "It is our hope that our children will have opportunities to acquire more knowledge and be adorned with spiritual and cultural formation."

Sister Chaiyaphuek spoke of how the religious live with the youngsters, "penetrating their culture and understanding their backgrounds and conditions, helping them in words and in deeds."

"We teach curriculum of life, which we consider rare and invaluable," she said. "Above all, it is a blessing for us."

Self-reliant

Traffickers based in Thailand lure people in from poor, neighboring countries, such as Myanmar. It is also a hub for these modern-day slaves to be transported to other destination countries. Trafficked human beings are forced to work in a variety of often-dangerous jobs, or exploited sexually.

Sister Kanlaya Trisopa of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bangkok told ZENIT about a school founded after 15 girls almost ended up locked in the trafficking trade.

"They were luckily saved because the job agents were [put] under arrest," Sister Trisopa said. "We were contacted by the police to take care of those girls, otherwise, they would be sent back to their parents."

"Realizing their fate and knowing that they would soon be victimized again, we didn't hesitate to lend them a hand. We discussed with the girls and their parents and offered our assistance. Some chose to return home with their parents, while others decided to stay with us.

"We pledged to give them vocational training with the hope that they would be self-reliant and able to support their family."

The sisters implemented a curriculum of sewing and handcrafts and a small school was born.

"We felt relieved and happy that they didn't have to seek jobs in the cities and risk potential dangers of human trafficking," Sister Trisopa said.

#### Honest living

Training in local artistry and basic agriculture keep youth from being forced to seek their livelihood elsewhere.

Sister Francoise Jiranonda of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres explained to ZENIT that "our students are taught to spend time wisely and worthily. They learn to weave and do their traditional embroidery. They also do basic, self-sufficient farming. They grow rice as well as vegetables and seasonal fruits.

"They are advised to use organic fertilizers or natural fertilizers such as animal waste so that they don't have to pay extra money."

The students, she added, are encouraged to be "diligent and hard-working."

"They learn how to cook and to keep their house neat and clean," the nun explained. "Hygienic living is steadily emphasized. We keep telling them that the family will be happier if the mother and women know how to better their living conditions."

The sisters have also begun giving job training to a group of boys "who had fallen prey to social problems. [...] We provide food and accommodation as well as education and job training for them," she said. "We are hopeful that they will earn their living honestly, and be able to understand themselves and others, and most of all, be willing to bear the responsibilities of breadwinners and men, and treat women equally with love and care."

#### Good Samaritans

Moreover, the students are taught the importance of charity and kindness toward their neighbors. The victims of HIV/AIDS give an on-site chance to put that lesson into practice, Sister Jiranonda noted.

"The students have come to know about life and fate of the HIV/AIDS infected and affected children under our care," she said. "They take turns to show their love and sympathy of those young kids. They hold them, hug them, feed them and bathe them."

The young women are being trained for a future, dignified life, Sister Jiranonda affirmed: "We encourage them to feel dignified and proud of their girlhood and motherhood. We prepare them to be ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with men or their future husbands to build their own families."

"What we have done for those girls, once vulnerable to human trafficking is an unwritten

curriculum," the sister reflected. "It is automatically, naturally, and spiritually inspired by love deepened in the hearts of the religious women and lay teachers who have witnessed the cruelties of social injustice and undergone certain orientations and training to counter human trafficking."

[Kathleen Naab contributed to this report]

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