

Pope Backs Nuns' Work to Stop Human Trafficking

Conference Gathers Religious, Experts to Compare Notes

VATICAN CITY, JUNE 15, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI is lauding the commitment made by women religious to put a stop to human trafficking and rebuild the lives of those victimized by this phenomenon.

The Pope affirmed his support for the initiative in a telegram signed by his secretary of state, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone. The papal message was sent to a four-day international conference being held in Rome on what various congregations of women religious are doing to oppose human trafficking. The conference began today.

The Holy Father contended that it is important to bring about "a renewed awareness of the inestimable value of life and an ever more courageous commitment to the defense of human rights and the overcoming of every type of abuse."

The Pontiff expressed his "deeply-felt appreciation for the laudable initiative" that has gathered together not only religious and experts, but also members of the International Organization for Migration.

Prophetic role

For his part, the recently named president of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers, Archbishop Antonio Vegliò, inaugurated the working sessions by expressing his "admiration for the work [already] done."

The archbishop underlined the dramatic reality of human trafficking; L'Osservatore Romano reported him saying that data he has received indicate the phenomenon could be much more widespread than what is reported, victimizing as many as 4 million people across the globe.

In the Friday press conference presenting the conference, it was reported that 2.5 million people are affected by trafficking, which is a \$150 billion business -- money that goes in the pockets of those who control the markets of prostitution, trafficking in organs, and forms of slavery that predominantly affect women and children.

In this context, Archbishop Vegliò affirmed, the Church has a role that is "not only important, but also prophetic."

He said that before all else, it is important to "know the factors that encourage and especially attract

prostitution, and the strategies used by recruiters, traffickers, intermediaries and those who abuse the victims."

Then, in the commitment made by the religious to combat human trafficking, the Vatican official affirmed that personal and spiritual formation is needed, so that they know how to deal with difficult and broken lives that need to be reconstructed.

Out of the dark

Archbishop Vegliò also highlighted the importance of collaboration and interchanging information.

"Many women religious are already doing excellent work in this area," he said. "You have to know about this [work] and share it more thoroughly at the national and global level."

To overcome human trafficking, information is decisive, the archbishop affirmed. He suggested "working with the press to ensure adequate information about this grave problem. The more hidden it remains, the longer it will endure."

Archbishop Vegliò assured that his dicastery is ready to offer all the support possible to help the religious in their efforts. But he also asked to be privy to the information sharing since, "we also have the need to know and share the ways in which this is proceeding so that we can also contribute to this grand undertaking."