

elimination of slavery and human trafficking by the year 2020 (Pope Francis *Huffington Post*). Various groups in Nigerian have made efforts to combat this menace. We shall look at the efforts made by the church so far. The Church is first because she is at the forefront of combating human trafficking in Nigeria. This was through the activities of the Women Religious (Catholic Rev. Sisters) of Nigeria. In 1998, the Nigeria Conference of Women Religious Leaders was alarmed and appalled at the many Nigerian women who were involved in the sex slavery in Europe. In Italy alone, there were 15,000 of them, caught up mostly, totally against their wills in forced prostitution! It is not easy to provide exact statistics regarding this issue because of its clandestine nature but records show that thousands of women and girls are being trafficked from developing countries and brought into conditions in which their basic human rights are violated.

In January 2007, from 20 – 24, about twenty seven women and one man from seven African and two European countries, representing different religious congregations and Church based Christian and Muslim organizations gathered in Nairobi, Kenya, at an International Conference on Trafficking in women and children, to deliberate on ways of combating this evil menace of human trafficking. This Conference was sponsored by Mensen met een Missie (MM) then known as CMC in collaboration with Dutch Foundation of Religious against Trafficking in Women (SRTV) all of Netherlands. Dutch Foundation of Religious against Trafficking is set up to help in the struggle against the growing trade in women and the corresponding forced prostitution. It is the group's intention to contribute in compliance with religious and cultural aspects to the creation of a respectable future for the victims of this trade (SRTV).

They all agreed at this Conference to undertake actions against this rapidly growing problem in Africa. Having placed much emphasis on networking this group decided to form a network: African Network Against Human Trafficking (ANAHT).

The main Focus of ANAHT activities include:

- Working on awareness raising concerning issues of human trafficking
- Encouraging and strengthening the organizations that are undertaking activities to battle the problem of human trafficking
- Facilitating networking activities among the different member organizations
- Working in prevention, assistance and advocacy against human trafficking. To achieve this goal they work together with other religious, faith based organisations and other key players in this fight in our various countries, in Africa and the world at large.

The office of African Network Against Human Trafficking (ANAHT) is in Lagos, Nigeria, for now. This same office coordinates some of the Anti-trafficking activities of the Religious in Nigeria, as it shares the same office with COSUDOW (Committee for the Support of the Dignity of Women), Lagos Branch. With the appointment of a full time Coordinator for ANAHT, a lot has been done in the name of ANAHT. ANAHT has participated in many international programs and belong to such networks as TALITHAKUM (International Network of Consecrated Life Against Trafficking in Persons), INRATIP (International Network of Religious Against Trafficking in Persons) and collaborates with many other organizations and networks that share the same goals and aspirations with them (ANAHT 2014).

CONCLUSION

Human trafficking is no respecter of any person. It is insensitive to their vulnerable conditions and is a contemporary form of slavery. Even with all the awareness created, arrests made and prosecution of traffickers, this evil continues to flourish. Ironically, the strength of the Nigerian trafficking networks lies in the element of reciprocity between traffickers and victims. The religious and legal sanctioning of the pact between the two parties, as well as prospects for a better economic situation when the indentured prostitution ends, give the majority of victims a strong motivation to comply. Suffice to observe that the church is called to be the epiphany of God's love and not just prophetic and silent witnesses, but also eloquent denouncers of all inhuman activities.

Unfortunately, the pact between victims and traffickers makes it particularly difficult to combat this evil. In several European countries, authorities have "rescued" women from their traffickers, but they return to prostitution to fulfil their obligations towards their sponsors. For the police, the religious element has provided a convenient explanation. For the media, the combination of vice and "voodoo" has fuelled sensational coverage. Therefore, it is vital to understand the social and cultural context of human trafficking while recognizing that the most intriguing aspects of this context, as in the Nigerian case, are not necessarily the ones that can best explain it. While the global scale of human trafficking is difficult to quantify precisely, as many as 800,000 people may be trafficked across international borders annually, with many more trafficked within the borders of their own countries. Organized criminal groups are earning billions of dollars in profits from trafficking and exploiting people, many of whom are victims of severe human rights violations. Trafficked persons are often victims to abuse such as rape, torture, debt bondage, unlawful confinement, and threats

against their family or other persons close to them, as well as other forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence.

The demand for cheap labour, sexual services and certain criminal activities are among the root causes of trafficking while a lack of opportunity, resources and social standing are other contributing factors.

Human Trafficking has become a worldwide problem in recent years and has without doubt, come to be the world's fastest growing global crime by which people are enslaved and one of the largest sources of income for organised crime. Every year, the sanctity and growth of the human race is threatened by traffickers who buy and sell millions of women, men and children to enslave and exploit in numerous ways. Also referred to as Modern Slavery, it is estimated that approximately 35.8 million people in the world today are made to engage non-consensually in activities such as commercial sex, forced labour, street crime, domestic servitude and even the sale of organs and human sacrifice. Condemned as a human rights violation, human trafficking in its many forms affects people of all sexual orientations irrespective of age, race, ethnicity and religion; even though, there are a number of situations that can make a person more vulnerable to trafficking.

In the cause of this study, it was discovered that the church is playing a leading role in the combat against human trafficking globally and particularly the Nigerian Catholic community with her numerous bodies and agencies have been very active in this regard. The Catholic Church has played and is still playing a prominent role in Nigeria to combat this obnoxious 21st Century modern slavery. The Catholic Church bears witness to the teachings of Christ and has done so very well through the centuries. The church teaches that human life is a sacred gift from God and must be respected and safeguarded at all stages – from conception through natural death (Pope Paul VI, *Humane Vitae*). Therefore, Catholic organizations in different continents have developed shelters as well as medical, social and pastoral services for victims of human trafficking.

The Anglican community have also been involved in this fight against human trafficking but they have not done much especially the Anglican Community in Nigeria. The Redeemed Christian Church (RCCG) to some extent is involved in the fight; other Pentecostal bodies seem to be engaged in other forms of social welfare activities such as prison ministry and visitation of motherless babies' homes. In summary therefore, the activities of the Catholic Church in fighting against this obnoxious phenomenon is quite commendable and must be encouraged.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to effectively rehabilitate and reintegrate victims, there must be strong collaboration and networking between care-givers in both victims' origin and destination countries. The care-givers are to play their different roles in the different countries for proper rehabilitation and reintegration to take place in the lives of the victims (women) they serve and to make judicious use of available resources. As a result of the complexities of human trafficking, particularly its clandestine nature, there is always the need for networking between stakeholders and law enforcement agencies. In the same vein, this can be extended between Catholic churches.

Essentially, the over-riding recommendation is that the Federal Government should take steps to implement the Protocol to which it is a signatory. In making recommendations, it is recognized that there is a need to take into account the various aspects of the problem. The Protocol has taken note of the multidimensional nature of human trafficking, it is a criminal problem, a human rights problem, a labour problem and a public order problem. Specific recommendations are now made, based on the findings of this study. These recommendations apply to both the Federal Government as well as State Governments that are source states for victims.

Despite efforts made to reduce human trafficking, the menace seems to continue unabated. This shows there is need for massive awareness campaign against the evils of human trafficking. Nigeria continues to intensify efforts to ensure a trafficking free society. Human trafficking will be completely eradicated when all those involved as countries of origin transit and destination sincerely join hands to fight against it.

Governments should invest in education and provide alternative economic opportunities for children and the youth. This will greatly reduce the number of those that will be available for trafficking.

Countries should be encouraged to take action against this crime at the national level first, supported by international bodies.

There should be severe penalty for traffickers at home and at the destination countries. *Name and Shame* principle should be used that entails public condemnation of identified traffickers and media exposure, with the names of convicted traffickers circulated to all Embassies.

Basic rights of the victims of trafficking must be respected bearing in mind their special needs and predicament. A collaborative approach that brings together anti-corruption

and anti-human trafficking measures should be devised. Corruption should be integrated in anti-trafficking plans.

Further research should be encouraged on society, corruption and human trafficking. Attention should also be focused on migration issues, raising awareness about migration related risks and monitoring migration trends within and between countries. There is the need for staff of Nigerian Immigration service to be represented at Nigerian Missions abroad, especially in those countries identified as either destination or transit points for human traffickers. This will help the service quickly determine the causative factors and strategies for addressing this.

There should be a renewed campaign on the importance of the family, good family name and a de-emphasis on materialism. Religious institutions should be encouraged to highlight these and condemn the inhumane crime of human trafficking.



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