



## HUMAN TRAFFICKING: A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY



**trócaire** Working for  
a Just World.

 **APT**  
ACT TO PREVENT TRAFFICKING

 **COUNCIL FOR  
JUSTICE & PEACE**

A photograph of a man with curly hair, shirtless, sitting on a sandy beach. He is focused on mending a fishing net. A large, shallow, round bowl sits on the sand in front of him. The background shows a calm sea and a clear sky. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

**“HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS AN OPEN WOUND ON  
THE BODY OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY, A SCOURGE UPON THE  
BODY OF CHRIST. IT IS A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY.”**

POPE FRANCIS, 10 APRIL 2014, ROME

# CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Addressing an international conference in Rome on the issue of human trafficking, with the participation of representatives of the Catholic Church and of civil society, along with international senior law enforcement officials from around the globe, Pope Francis made the following appeal: “I exhort the international community to adopt an even more unanimous and effective strategy against human trafficking, so that in every part of the world, men and women may no longer be used as a means to an end, and that their inviolable dignity may always be respected.”

In 2002, Saint John Paul II stated that “The alarming increase in the trade of human beings is one of the pressing political, social and economic problems associated with the process of globalisation.”<sup>1</sup> Trafficking in people is now one of the most widespread forms of international crime after the global trade in illegal arms and drugs. This crime is all the more serious because its hidden nature frequently allows the traffickers to operate undetected. The term ‘human trafficking’ encompasses a range of human rights abuses, including labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, forced begging and the theft of organs. What they all have in common, however, is a blatant disregard for the human person and the de-humanising of the victims, regarded as commodities that can be bought and sold. It is a crime that exploits the vulnerability and insecurity of those who find themselves without access to education or employment, those who are victims of violence, either at home or as a result of armed conflict, or those who are unable to provide

for their families in their own country and are prevented by legal barriers from accessing employment in another State.

In the 2013 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (paragraphs 75 and 211) Pope Francis puts this modern version of slavery at the top of the list of social evils, making an impassioned plea on behalf of victims: ‘Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? ... Let us not look the other way. There is greater complicity than we think. The issue involves everyone! This infamous network of crime is now well established in our cities, and many people have blood on their hands as a result of their comfortable and silent complicity’ (211).

In an appeal to elected representatives in Northern Ireland to strengthen legislation for the prevention of human trafficking, prosecution of the criminals responsible and protection of the victims, Cardinal Seán Brady has stated: “Human trafficking, in its many forms, is one of the most serious forms of injustice in our society. It is a crime that robs its victims, not only of their basic rights and freedoms, but of their very dignity as persons.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Saint John Paul II, *Letter to Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran on the Occasion of the International Conference “Twenty-First Century Slavery – The Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings*, 15 May 2002, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>2</sup> “Cardinal Brady’s letter to Members of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly concerning the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill”, October 2013, [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie).

## VIEWED THROUGH THE PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING, HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS SEEN AS

A crime of injustice against humanity

A violation of the human rights of the person

A crime against the dignity of the human person, made in the image and likeness of God, particularly women and children

A form of modern-day slavery

## THE RESOURCES IN THIS PACK FOLLOW THE SEE, JUDGE, ACT METHOD OF REFLECTION

What exactly is happening? Why is this happening? (the causes)  
Who is being affected? (the consequences)

What do you think about all of this? (why?)  
What do your values, your beliefs and your faith say about this?  
What do you think should be happening?

What exactly would you like to change? (long term)  
What action are you going to take now? (short term)  
Who can you involve to help you in your action?

# SEE CASE STUDY: STELLA'S STORY

I wake to the sound of pounding. A man shouts, "Get up! Get up! Now! Pack your bag. You are moving". I jump from the bed, quickly wash my face, dress and pack my few belongings. I have learned to obey. I have paid dearly for delaying. The scars on my body will never fade.

Outside my door, Teeth is waiting impatiently. "Kitchen, now, eat. You are going on a long journey". Across the table from me, the white girl is eating breakfast too. She looks terrible, her cheekbones prominent, her eyes dead.

"Get into the car". The white girl and I get into the back seat of the car. Teeth and a white man get into the front. We drive off. I think we are crossing a border, going into another country.

No one is talking. A few months before, I was a university student in Ibadan, Nigeria. I was doing well. I was going to be a social worker. I was staying with my mother's cousin, Joseph. He made it very clear to me that he did not want me in his house.

He sold me to his friend telling me I was going to a university in Europe. Next day, the friend came to the house. "Don't worry about anything", he told me, "I have your papers. We will leave on Saturday". I said I would need to go home and tell my parents I was leaving for Europe, but my cousin said, "No, there is no time for that. I will tell them you are safe with my friend here, Mr Mumu". Mr Mumu smiled. "I will take good care of you. Think of the money you will be sending back from Europe. Your parents will be able to live in comfort. By the way, don't tell anyone about this. People can be very jealous."

The following Saturday, Mr Mumu and I were on the plane. It was my first experience of

flying and I was nervous and also excited. When we landed, we got into another plane and after about an hour we landed again. Outside the airport, we were picked up by the man I later called Teeth and taken to a house in a city. As soon as we got into the house, Teeth took my bag and my papers. He showed me to a bedroom and told me that would be where I would be sleeping, "And doing other things", he said and laughed rudely. As he left the room, he locked the door. I sat on the bed and wondered what was going to happen next.

After some time, Teeth came back. "Now", he said, "My reward. Let's see what has come from Nigeria. I miss that place. Let me smell you". He threw me down on the bed and raped me. I screamed and screamed, but no one came to help me. Then Teeth left me, saying, "Clean yourself up. We are expecting visitors". That night three white men came and had sex with me. They were rough. When the last man left, I felt sick and disgusted with myself. How could I have been so stupid? Why had I agreed to come here? What would happen now? I thought of my parents and cried bitterly.

For several weeks, I lived in a daze, men coming in one after the other to have sex with me, insulting me and calling me names. Day after day, night after night, men came, white men, a few young men, a lot of old men. Every day, Teeth told me I owed the businessman, Mr Mumu, a lot of money for my air ticket and I would have to do this "work" to pay off my debt. "Don't forget", he told me, "we know your relatives. If you don't co-operate, we will kill your mother or your young sister, Anna..." "I am in Hell", I told myself. I wanted to die.

Days and nights passed. I suffered sex and abuse from men who came in and beatings from Teeth when customers complained that I was sulky and unwilling to enjoy the sex. "Smile", Teeth told me, "Smile. Show the clients you like them. That way they will pay more".

Now here I was in a car, going somewhere else for more of the same. "Here we are", said the white driver. I looked out the car window and saw a road sign saying, "Welcome to B... town". (A familiar Irish town.) The car stopped outside a big house and Teeth ordered us to get out. That night men came, one after the other, just

like the other house, abusing me. Weeks passed but due to a raid by police on the house I was rescued and started my long journey back to freedom. I am here in Ireland, completing my college studies. I am still receiving counselling. I still have nightmares and live in fear of meeting my captors. The scars on my body are a daily reminder of my days in captivity. Years have been stolen from my life and I will never get them back.

(An abridged version of a case story accredited to Eilis Coe APT with names changed.)

## FOR REFLECTION

As you listen to this story there are many trafficked women in Ireland in a state similar or not too unlike Stella's story.

Are you willing to challenge this situation?

What touched you most about this story? How does Stella's plight challenge you?

## KNOW HOW TO RECOGNISE THE SIGNS OF TRAFFICKING

### IS SOMEONE

Working against their will?

Having their movements controlled?

Subject to violence or threats?

Distrustful of authorities?

Unable to communicate freely with others?

Unsure of where they are?

Not integrated with the local community?

### DO THEY APPEAR TO

Have little or no time off?

Live in overcrowded accommodation?

Have bruises or unexplained injuries?

Be subject to security at their accommodation or work premises?

Have no access to their earnings?

Work excessive hours?



# JUDGE ADDRESSING THE CAUSES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Due to the hidden nature of this crime, it is difficult to state with certainty the number of victims of human trafficking in Ireland. However, evidence from An Garda Síochána, the PSNI and the Departments of Justice, North and South, indicates that victims of trafficking have been identified and rescued throughout Ireland in recent years. The majority of victims identified have been women and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Human trafficking is a complex phenomenon, subject to constant changes, as traffickers seek new ways to avoid detection and prosecution. It is a crime that primarily affects migrants from poorer countries, but residents of the UK and Ireland have also been identified as victims of trafficking in recent years. Vulnerable individuals, such as young people in the care system, people who are homeless or struggling with addiction, can be exploited for labour or sexual services within their home country in cases of internal trafficking. There have also been shocking cases of young women from the UK who have become victims of trafficking when travelling abroad because they placed their trust in people who tricked and exploited them. A powerful account is provided by Sophie Hayes in *Trafficked: My Story* (HarperCollins, 2012). In short, we all need to be alert to the signs and the dangers of human trafficking.

In the prevention of human trafficking, the demand that drives this crime is an area that requires particular attention. A mentality that views human beings as a commodity that can be bought and sold has no place in our society. In the case of women and girls trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, the underlying attitudes that lead some men to believe that they have the right to “purchase” another human being for their own gratification needs to be addressed both culturally, through educational programmes, and in legislation. This requires

us to engage in difficult conversations on the themes of sexuality, relationships and respect. For example, the issue of prostitution is one that can make people uncomfortable when raised in ‘polite’ conversation. Yet, while we avoid talking about the subject, the so-called sex industry is spreading and becoming more normalised through internet ads and the promotion of strip clubs and lap dancing as acceptable social activities for men. At the heart of these conversations needs to be an acknowledgement that trafficking and sexual exploitation is an injustice that affects our whole society. Recognising that the majority of the victims of human trafficking are migrants, we also have a responsibility to contribute to long-term measures aimed at addressing the problem of human trafficking on a global scale. This includes making a contribution to political, economic, social and cultural initiatives that tackle the root causes of this problem. Foremost amongst these are the factors in the home countries that cause migrants to fall victim to trafficking, such as poverty, unemployment and violence. As Saint John Paul II rightly noted: “Who can deny that the victims of this crime are often the poorest and most defenceless members of the human family, the “least” of our brothers and sisters?”<sup>3</sup> More recently, Pope Francis has described human trafficking as a crime against humanity, emphasising that it “affects the most vulnerable people in society: women, children, the disabled, the poorest and those who come from situations of family or social disintegration.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran on the Occasion of the International Conference “Twenty-First Century Slavery – The Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings”*, 15 May 2002, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>4</sup> “Pope Francis: Human Trafficking is a crime against humanity”, *Zenit*, 12 December 2013.

# ACT RESPONDING IN FAITH TO THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

“All persons of good will, whether they profess a religion or not, cannot allow these women, these men and these children to be treated as objects, deceived, violated, often repeatedly sold, for various purposes, and at the end either killed or ruined physically and mentally, to end up discarded and abandoned. It is shameful.”

POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVES, 12 DECEMBER 2013

The Act to Prevent Trafficking (APT) network, works to combat human trafficking according to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Placing human dignity at the centre of its mission, APT’s vision is “that of a world in which all persons are respected, valued and given the dignity which is theirs by right, a world where no one seeks to exploit or enslave another for the purposes of sexual gratification or financial gain.”

Having educated yourself about the problem of human trafficking in Ireland, APT invites you to:

- Raise awareness: even talking about these issues with your family and friends can help. As a group, could you organise an event to share information in your local community? Could you network and exchange information with other groups? Could you display information in public places?
- Pray for the victims of trafficking;
- Educate yourself about the signs that human trafficking might be happening in your community. If you see suspicious activity, use the confidential telephone lines provided by the PSNI (0800 555 111) and An Garda Síochána (1800 25 00 25) – you could be saving someone’s life;

- Know how to recognise the signs that a vulnerable person may need your help. This information is available from the Irish Government’s Anti-Human Trafficking Unit ([www.blueblindfold.gov.ie](http://www.blueblindfold.gov.ie)) and from NI Direct Government Services ([www.nidirect.gov.uk/human-trafficking](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/human-trafficking));
- Keep the issue alive among your political representatives and, when appropriate, take part in lobbying for measures to prevent trafficking and support victims.

The APT website provides a range of resources to support awareness-raising on human trafficking. These include:

- Definitions and explanations of key terms;
- Case studies from survivors;
- Resources for education and spiritual reflection;
- Updates on the latest developments on human trafficking in Ireland and world-wide.

APT members are available to talk to any group who would like information or encouragement. We recommend that, before inviting a speaker, you do some networking and research in your local area to bring together representatives of agencies, organisations or groups that might come into contact with victims of human trafficking. With the invited speaker, you can then reflect together on how best to take action in your local area.

# DAY OF PRAYER FOR VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING, 8 FEBRUARY

---

On 8 February, the Feast Day of St. Josephine Bakhita, we remember in a special way the victims of human trafficking.

St. Josephine Bakhita, born in 1869 in Darfur, Sudan, was first kidnapped for slavery between the ages of seven and nine. She would be re-sold five times over the next eight years. Brought to Italy by her last owner, she found her freedom with the support of the Canossian Sisters of Venice.

In 1890 she asked to be baptised and six years later took her vows as a Canossian Sister. Over the next fifty years she worked to overcome the trauma of her years of slavery through a life of prayer and service.

Following her canonisation in 2000, the example of St. Josephine has provided a powerful witness of hope and healing for victims of human trafficking.

## PRAYER

O Holy Trinity,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
we thank you for the gifts  
of humility and charity,  
which you bestowed on  
Blessed Josephine Bakhita.  
We glorify her for her virtues.  
Grant the prayers of those  
who call to her.

Amen

A video reflection entitled  
*Slaves no More – St Josephine Bakhita*,  
to support the Day of Prayer for Victims of Human Trafficking,  
is available from [www.iCatholic.ie](http://www.iCatholic.ie).



