

Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking Meeting on 9-11 April 2019, Vatican City

**Some Concluding reflections by
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It has been a great challenge for me – and perhaps for many others here present - to participate in this convening. Notice that I said it was a challenge –I did not say it was a pleasure, or a privilege, or an honor to be here (those are the words I usually use when opening a presentation – but, to be more honest – these days were a challenge! Indeed, it's been a challenge to confront such a complex, overwhelming, painful, hurtful, destructive phenomenon. We really were looking evil in the eye during these days.

We dissected the different forms of trafficking and reflected on the impact of trafficking, primarily on human persons directly and indirectly affected, and on the civil and religious communities that receive them - or reject them – at every stage of their journeys – from home territory, to transit, to permanent or temporary new host country and/or community. We also shared – with much generosity and conviction - our diverse experiences in response to human trafficking. We debated the correct words and concepts to be included in our observations and recommendations before we uploaded them onto the comprehensive website that will serve us with resources and ideas for a long time to come. We undertook all these efforts under the inspiration of the Word of God and of the Catholic Church's Teaching and Tradition, which are so well articulated in the *Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking*.

During my own reflections last night, I found myself asking one particular question over and over again, however – should we have listened to more direct testimonies of people directly affected by trafficking? Our speakers were passionate and so knowledgeable – but let's not forget Dr. Motus' point that is so often repeated by people we place in the category of “vulnerable” populations – “Nothing for us, without us.” People, who have experienced such violent, harmful, unjust, and discriminatory treatment by others, have strengths that many of us could never muster. So, let us not forget to learn from them as we accompany them and encourage them. Also, let us not risk becoming so convinced of the expertise that we have assembled in our respective organizations that we ignore the much more reality-based skills and resilience that migrants and refugees, including those who have been trafficked, and who have achieved, with slow but sure progress, their own integral human development - with, or without, our assistance. In order to benefit from such direct, person-to-person learnings, we need to listen to those directly affected and learn about, not only their negative experiences, but also their strengths and capacity to revive themselves and to live a new life. My ICMC staff colleagues could attest to you that I often become concerned when I cannot find, in our reports to funders, sufficient reference to the experiences of those whom we serve – I know that funders want numbers, and reports on achievement of expected outcomes, and on goals, objectives and indicators, but I believe that, as a Church-inspired organization, we cannot set aside, even for a moment, the human persons who must be at the center of our every service effort. And let us not forget the litmus test of success in our programs, as Ambassador Gianmarinaro proposed it: “The trafficked person needs social inclusion and full integration into the country of destination.”

One of my field visits to an ICMC project struck me deeply and remains vivid in my thoughts and prayers. The site was ICMC's program for refugees who report or seem to have been at risk of sexual and gender-based violence; these persons are immediately referred by UNHCR officials to our ICMC program that is based in the UNHCR compound in Kuala Lumpur, with a satellite office in Penang, Malaysia. There, ICMC has developed a Refugee Protection Corps, "staffed" by refugees themselves, who work collaboratively with, and under the supervision of ICMC professionals. These members of our Refugee Protection Corps answer the emergency hotlines, help affected refugees to access treatment, settle them into safe apartment housing or, if necessary, a shelter operated by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. Formerly, this corps only included women – but more recently we have added men to the corps – they always are accompanied by women during home visits. The men have shown themselves capable of providing care and support in very sensitive and professional ways. Perhaps most importantly, the men in the Protection Corps shared with me that they have changed their interactions with women in their own families and local communities – after having observed the harm and indignities imposed on women and children by other men in their own communities. They sometimes are asked by their male friends – "why are you doing 'women's' work by washing dishes, changing the baby, etc.?" And they bravely answer that work in the home also belongs to men. Pope Francis himself confirmed my own conclusions in this regard when he said on the World Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action against Human Trafficking on 12 February 2018: **"All those who have been victims of trafficking have been immeasurable sources of support for new victims, and extremely important informational resources to save many other young people."**

In our discussion group H (for "Health") during these days, we debated the content and the titles to be considered for joint training manuals and other resource materials. I don't think we managed to include and paste a star on any resources or methodologies that can and should be undertaken by migrants themselves, including those affected by trafficking and other forms of exploitation. So, let us not ignore the basic, practical actions that can re-orient the roles played by women and men, girls and boys, in both migrant, transit, and host communities, but never make it into most official manuals or other resource materials.

Let us also give our sincere and heartfelt thanks to the women religious who have led the way in the Church's response to those who have been trafficked and their loved ones, and to make such dynamic efforts to eliminate the scourge of human trafficking from our global human family.

I would like to conclude on a hope-filled note – as we looked evil in the eye during these days, we also witnessed the stories of determination, strength, and success, first of all, by those directly affected and, secondly, by those who walk with them in patience and confidence that God will provide to them, the perseverance and strength to begin a new life. As we approach the holiest time of the Christian year, let us keep up hope, and remind ourselves often of Pope Francis' words during the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing during last Easter Sunday: **"We Christians believe and know that Christ's resurrection is the true hope of the world, the hope that does not disappoint ... it is the power of that love which humbles itself and gives itself to the very end, and thus truly renews the world ... it bears the fruits of hope and dignity ... where there are migrants and refugees (so often rejected by today's culture of waste), and victims of the drug trade, human trafficking, and contemporary forms of slavery."**