

February 28, 2014



AGAINST THE TRAFFICKING - Even though we are living in the third millennium, our era has to deal with a terrible social sore: that of “human trafficking”. It’s a new and crueler form of slavery that cancels every human right, a reality that has a common substrate, soaked by several highly toxic elements: violence, imposition, domination, exploitation, which refers to a human being inexorably reduced to an “object”, to a “product”, to a “commodity”.

It’s been 14 years that I have been dealing with this terrible phenomenon. I started in 2000, reaching out to girls who were on the streets of the city of Cagliari (Sardinia), where each evening, half-naked and numb from the cold, they were waiting for clients. Today, the Daughters of Charity run three Road Units, reaching the three cities in Sardinia, where street prostitution takes place: Cagliari, Sassari and Olbia. This is the first possibility to approach girls who are trafficked in prostitution. We reach them at night, when they are waiting for their clients. We offer them not only a personal and human contact, but we listen to their stories, pray with them and propose some alternatives to their exploitation. The age of the women we meet is between 16 and 32. They are mainly Nigerian and Romanian; while there are also women from China and from Eastern Europe. Every time we move about the three cities we meet about 50/60 women, forced to work on the road in a timeframe from 7pm to the early hours of the morning.

As a Community, we asked ourselves this question: how can we help these women discover the gift of their dignity as a person but is destroyed by exploitation and by the commoditization of

the body? What kind of strategies could we use to intervene, to accompany, to overcome obstacles?

We realized that our task was, in such a dramatic world as the one of trafficking, a strong sign of the presence of God. The girls ask us support and, respecting their freedom, give them the opportunity to glimpse other paths and other futures. They ask us to be there for them, to be “artists in humanity”, bringing out of them the true masterpiece of God, hidden under a poor, destroyed appearance. We accompany them in the restructuring of their own social identity, in the path of a new life that tends to true freedom and complete autonomy.

We came up with the idea to open two host communities for these girls: a house of “escape” and first aid and a second house of welcome with different educational activities according to the needs and requests of the victims. The different activities are meant to protect the women through legal support, counseling, health care and legalization of documents. Afterwards, in the second house of hospitality, orientation, formation, social and employment integration with the possibility to study and to do professional trainings are offered. These girls can build their own goals of improvement within a learning center that provides them psychological –social -emotional and religious well-being.

We are not dealing with an easy mission, it takes time and is hard. A lot of commitment and patience is required to recuperate and rebuild what has been destroyed. It is as if we were in front of a precious but shattered jar that we try to recompose little by little with a lot of love and patience. These girls, who have lived an enormous experience of exploitation and humiliation, need more than ever a deep inner healing made of understanding, compassion, unconditional and disinterested love. One that does not ask anything in return, that never judges and much less condemns, but that accepts the person as she is, in order to alleviate her wounds and restore confidence and hope within her.

The major difficulty that we encounter along our way to help them to get free and to achieve a healthy autonomy, is a profound racism still present in our society. This racism closes the doors to welcome them, to offer them opportunities for jobs or housing. For this reason, we also give great importance to the work of raising awareness, especially in schools and parishes.

Beside this scourge, today there is another, equally important: the enslavement of foreign women for work or family reasons. Women are for a long time segregated in workplaces where they often suffer psychological, physical, and sometimes sexual violence and where they get

serious threats against their own family members. Some of our guests told us that they are forced to work up to 16-17 hours a day, without any remuneration, some are housed in small huts without any windows, without air, light or external contact, except with their employers; other, watched in sight, consuming just one meal a day. We have also taken care of these young women for a few years, thanks to the annual financial support provided by the Ministry for Equal Opportunities.

With Pope Francis we want to shout to the whole world that trafficking of people “is a crime against humanity.”

A Daughter of Charity

Source: Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, February 17, 2014