

**Human Trafficking, Human Rights-  
Creating a Safer World for the Most Vulnerable**

Mary DeLorey

Catholic Relief Services (CRS)

DIOCESE OF HARTFORD OCT 2011

**INTRO-** Thank you for this invitation and opportunity to be with you at your annual Diocesan event. I was asked to give a presentation on Trafficking in Persons and its relation to human rights concerns, and to do so from the international perspective of Catholic Relief Services, what we have learned about this horrendous abuse of the rights and dignity of human beings and what can be done to respond.

To put this in context I'd like to share a few stories with you ...

Moldova - Natalia

*Natalia is from Moldova, a small country in Eastern Europe with one of the highest rates of victims of sex trafficking. Like other young women from her village, even as an adolescent, as she looks to her future she sees little hope. She has described her future in Moldova as akin to sitting on a table that is increasingly tilted to slide her into poverty, drudgery and domestic violence- similar to lives of the women around her. There are few employment or educational options unless she migrates out of the country. She has heard the stories of what has happened to other girls who tried to migrate, some made it and actually got the decent job they had hoped for, but there are also terrible stories of those who disappeared, those who returned shattered and traumatized after years of being bought and sold in sex trafficking and shunned by the village, and others who had their families and young children threatened as a way to keep them from trying to escape their traffickers. Natalia doesn't believe this could possibly happen to her- not if she works with the woman who is a labor recruiter in the area- she is known in the community and by her family. She doesn't know that this woman is the first link in the chain of violent and degrading sex trafficking across multiple countries, leave their victims severely traumatized, if they survive at all.*

Brazil – *Carlos lived on the coast of Brazil, one of the most impoverished areas in the country- when he couldn't make enough money to feed his family and make sure school fees were paid for his children, He decided to take up the offer he heard of to work as a farm hand in the areas being cleared in the Amazon. He was recruited to clear trees for cattle production in a remote area where he and other workers drank from heavily contaminated water, were provided rancid food, slept under a makeshift plastic lean-to, and then was informed that he owed a large debt for these services and the transport to get him to the work area. When he objected to the conditions and realized he would never be able to repay his debt, he was beaten, threatened by the armed guards and branded with an iron.*

CA-US- *A few years ago a visit to the US-Mexico border was organized for US Bishops on the Migration Committee to bring attention to the situation of unaccompanied minor migrants and child trafficking victims. During this visit we met a 14 yr old boy from Central America who had migrated to the U.S. in search of work to help provide for his family. After a perilous journey through Guatemala and Mexico, he crossed the desert on foot and was found on a ranch in Texas, barely able to walk. The ranch owner said he could stay on his land...but it turned out this was on the condition that he work without pay, survive on no more than bread and water and be held in shackles each night so as not to escape. He started out as an unaccompanied child migrant and ended up a victim of trafficking, discovered because another child saw him, recognized something was horribly wrong and reported the situation.(She reported the case to her local priest –who just happened to have received a recent training on trafficking from MRS).*

As much as we would like to believe that slavery and human trafficking are only horrific aspects of our collective past, these tremendous abuses of human rights and human dignity have in some form continued to exist throughout the world and, in fact, are experiencing a dramatic resurgence in recent years. The details vary from country to country, but, put simply, human trafficking is the coerced use of human beings as objects of commerce. It is an emergence of modern day form of slave labor and extreme forms of sexual exploitation.

Trafficking in human beings is a multi-billion growth industry. Conservative estimates of the number of people trafficked into forced labor and prostitution range from 800,000 to 2 million across borders annually. Even larger numbers are trafficked within their own countries- It is estimated that approximately 12 million people around the world are currently victims of trafficking and forced labor. According to the U.S. Government 14.5-17,5000 people are trafficked into U.S. each year.

More often than not, trafficking victims are recruited through promises of what they believe are offers of legitimate jobs. However, they may be abducted or even purchased from family members. Once they in the hands of traffickers, victims' movements are generally restricted. They are isolated from the surrounding community, their legal documents are taken, and they are generally victims of considerable physical, sexual and psychological violence.

In destination countries, trafficking victims who escape or are picked up by local authorities are frequently not recognized as victims of a crime but rather considered undocumented aliens. Often, they are detained and deported, right back to the traffickers, where they are 'recycled' or resold, and their nightmare begins again.

As a result of increasing public attention on this crisis, in 2000 the Member countries of the United Nations established a definition of human trafficking which is now generally accepted throughout the world. This definition was developed as part of the United Nations' *Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime*, and more specifically the convention's *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*.

### **Core elements of the definition**

- Action of: Recruitment, transportation, transfer, receipt of persons
- By means of: deception, coercion, threat or use of force, abuse of power, giving of payments or benefits to a person in control of victim
- For the purpose of: exploitation, which includes at a minimum exploiting the prostitution or other sexual exploitation of others, force labor, slavery and slavery-like conditions, and the removal of organs.

### **Root Causes- HR concerns**

In May 2002 Pope John Paul II –*“The trade in human persons constitutes a shocking offence against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights. It is an affront to fundamental values that are shared by all cultures and peoples, values rooted in the very nature of the human person”*

It is impossible to deny the suffering of the victims of trafficking. What is often less understood are the forces that create and sustain this global problem- and it is essential to understand such forces, if long term solutions are to be created.

Trafficking is not occurring in a vacuum- it is tied to an array of unaddressed factors that create and deepen the vulnerability of millions. (We increasingly are seeing trafficking as part of a continuum of abusive practices with trafficking as an extreme end result)

**\*\*Since 1992 CRS has had over 100 counter trafficking projects in over 30 countries and as with most organizations responding to trafficking, we've had a steep learning curve- I'd like to share some of what we've learned**

We started programs Eastern Europe where CRS responded to human trafficking as a profound human-rights concern that was disproportionately impacting the poor and marginalized — the people who are traditionally CRS' first priority.

However, over the course of the past decade we have also increasingly recognized that human trafficking was in sectors we have prioritized for many years- **you could say we didn't so much seek out where trafficking was occurring – it found us**

We came across trafficking cases occurring in sectors we have prioritized for many years: economic development with poor communities; emergency response, HIV/AIDS; and programs for refugees, displaced people and migrants.

In 2005 - We brought our staff, partners and colleague agencies to focus on what we had collectively learned- case studies of what had and had not worked- to develop a strategy that would capitalize on our institutional strengths

During this conference we and our partners collectively decided that in our response to trafficking we had a moral obligation to do what we could to ensure that people in the areas where we worked didn't become victims to start with. (While also of course improving the response for traumatized survivors of trafficking)

**To do this we needed to analyze key factors creating vulnerability and what could be done to address these factors**

**Economic:** Trafficking has been described as "the dark underbelly of globalization." It is one of the end results of rapid economic, technological and social changes worldwide.

Such rapid changes have created or deepened people's vulnerability, and at the same time, expanded the opportunities for predators to exploit that vulnerability. CRS' recognized the need to reduce economic vulnerability for families and individuals while strengthening the ability of communities to protect people at-risk.

Economic factors driving the expansion of human trafficking include not only poverty itself but also:

- *Lack of employment options*, which may have existed in the past.
- *Elimination of social safety nets* –women and children can be disproportionately impacted by this
- *Movement of capital* — recent advances in technology and information systems have made the profits from criminal activity such as trafficking, easier to transfer and launder rapidly across the globe.
- *Race to the bottom on labor standards/cost of production* — increased international competition to produce consumer goods at the lowest cost possible can, and has, increased abusive labor practices, forced labor and slavery-like practices the most severe outcome. (outsourcing -responsibility for labor rights)

- *Corruption* — state corruption is a serious concern in many societies and is closely tied to the spread of trafficking.

*For example- In Eastern Europe the fall of economic and political systems in the 1980's and 1990's coincided with a sharp increase in human trafficking. The chaotic period before new systems were established included violent conflicts in the Balkans, a political vacuum filled in some cases, by organized crime, and economic decline that included the elimination of many jobs and social programs. Women and children were disproportionately impacted by these changes and quickly became the primary victims of human trafficking from this region.*

#### **Economic migration:**

*Juan Somavia, Former ILO Director General “ If you look at globalization from the point of view of people's concerns, its single biggest failure is its inability to create jobs where people live.”*

As economies are increasingly integrated and investment and employment quickly move from one part of the globe to another, workers generally do not have the legal freedom of movement to go where employment exists

**A large percentage of trafficking victims begin as migrants (undocumented AND legal, internal AND cross-border) in search of work.**

In the absence of safe and legal options for migration, including opportunities for immigrant families to be reunited, large numbers of migrants are at great risk of becoming trafficking victims. That risk is not only in transit but also after arrival, whether an immigrant is with or without legal documents.

Immigrant workers throughout the world are often in jobs that are poorly regulated and isolated - agricultural/ domestic labor – two of labor areas with highest rate of labor slavery.

#### **Emergency and Conflict:**

\*\* In *conflict and post-conflict periods and natural disasters* displaced and endangered people make desperate decisions, in an attempt to get out of harm's way-and there are unfortunately many predators ready and willing to prey on the in their hour of need.

\*\*The international response and related policies towards refugees and asylum seekers often fall far short the needs of large numbers of people for durable solutions.

\*\*Not only immediate emergency but also reconstruction period-when the camera's and international attention is gone

*When the Tsunami hit Asia some years ago, many people lost their lives, children were orphaned, women widowed, communities lost their means of support in fishing villages and cities alike. In India, where the tsunami impacted the coast, a partner organization CRS works with on human trafficking immediately conducted a trafficking risk assessment along with emergency responders, where it became obvious that if communities and families were not able to quickly reconstruct and re-establish a means of income, widows and orphans would be seen as economic burdens and be at much greater risk to be sold into trafficking. Reconstruction funding and protection measures needed to occur rapidly to prevent this.*

#### **Other Social Factors:**

**Gender Discrimination:** Although men and boys are also vulnerable to trafficking, a significant social factor

underlying trafficking is the low status of women and girls in many parts of the world. Low status can lead to discriminatory and abusive treatment. A significant percentage of trafficking victims experienced domestic violence or incest earlier in life. Many countries have limited legal protections for women in cases of domestic and sexual violence or harassment.

**Child protection/Access to Education:** Children who are not in formal school settings are far more likely to become victims of human trafficking. Street kids easily disappear. Child laborers have few protections against the worst forms of abuse and servitude. Schools are also a key venue for teaching both the child and family about the dangers of human trafficking and for developing job skills that lead to economic options.

**HIV/AIDS:** CRS works extensively with people impacted by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Tragically, a significant relationship exists between human trafficking and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

Not only is human trafficking creating greater risk of exposure to HIV/AIDS, the HIV/AIDS crisis itself is driving greater victimization. Without the support of a family structure, children who have lost their parents to AIDS are particularly vulnerable to traffickers and young children are trafficked precisely because they are less likely to be HIV-positive.

**Demand:** In actions that combat trafficking, there is a more recent and growing attention paid to the 'clients' of sex trafficking and consumer demand for products that are the end result of forced labor. As with trafficking in drugs or guns, it is essential to approach the problem in terms of supply (and the conditions creating supply), distribution by traffickers, criminal networks, corrupt authorities, and demand (clients and consumers). There are particularly promising efforts currently on corporate social responsibility efforts and mapping of products from raw material to final international product and how both investors and consumers can respond.

**RESPONSES:- SIGNS OF HOPE:** I work a good deal with our partner organizations in Latin America – and they often analyze serious social problems from the perspective of (**Sombras and luzes**) shadows and light-identifying the 'darkness' for what it is, but also the signs of hope and what is being done to respond

Since 2000 Governments throughout the world have passed legislation specifically criminalizing trafficking, initiating prosecutions (though rates remain low) – Very creative and encouraging responses are occurring throughout the world. Just to mention a few areas of promising practice with our own partners:

**In India-** A program created initially by a Catholic Religious Brother and a Hindu religious to respond to the immediate needs of countless sex trafficking victims has blossomed into an organization that helped create the first state-wide laws against trafficking in India, provides specialized residential care for child trafficking victims, created transitional programming and small businesses for women survivors to take their lives back and provide leadership within the organization, and have been called upon by groups throughout the country to help establish similar models elsewhere  
(*example of Residential Center child survivors of sex trafficking*)

**In Moldova:** Our research on trafficking in this small eastern European country identified high school age girls in poor rural communities as the most likely to end up future trafficking victims –due to the lack of employment options, high poverty and lack of basic protection against domestic violence etc. Through initial US Dept of Labor, then Foundation funding we were able to establish partnerships with employers and the Moldovan Dept of labor and local communities to provide training for guaranteed jobs,

establishment of branches of some businesses in local communities, and supportive skills training on financial literacy, civil and human rights etc.

**In Brazil-** our Church and nongovernmental partners have created a model to address forced labor in Amazon that maps out where trafficking is occurring in the creation of products for the national and international markets. These partners, with the support of the Brazilian Govt are engaging companies to proactively weed out slave labor practices. And alternatively Brazil has a 'dirty list' with economic sanctions for the worst violators. This is a model that is being studied by the U.S. Government- and the USG along with the International Labor Organization bring our Brazil partners to the U.S. to meet with government representatives, multinational companies and social investment organizations to learn from this model.

**In Mexico** – Many desperately poor farmers and farm workers, no longer able to remain on their own land; apply for the notoriously problematic agricultural guestworker program. A route to a legal work visa- this program has been plagued with abuses on the U.S. side over the years. In recent years on the Mexican side, recruiters have illegally required aspiring workers to pay large fees to be considered for these visas. What is little more than extortion, generally cannot be paid by the workers so are given in loan- and many of these legal workers, upon arrival are already in a state of debt bondage. CRS established a program, (now an independent organization) that seeks to turn the equation around. The program called CITA, is an association of 6,000 agricultural workers that have established a secure recruiting system that works with recruiters legally bound not only by prevailing but unenforced U.S. labor law, but also by a code of conduct incorporated into the contracts, agree to monitoring of practices and work with a mediation center when problems arise- these mechanisms are set for expansion in the near future. The longer term goal remains a more comprehensive migration reform and overhaul of the guestworker program if it is to continue, but in the meantime for the workers involved this is reducing some of the worst abuses – including cases of outright trafficking. **(We worked with other organizations to incorporate protections in foreign labor recruitment into the current trafficking victims protection act legislation)**

#### **CATHOLIC RESPONSE:**

Human trafficking has begun to receive considerable attention and growing priority for international response from multiple sectors of the Catholic Church. **The Church is perhaps uniquely situated as one of the few global institutions with social programs and the capacity to respond in a coordinated manner in countries of trafficking origin, transit and destination.**

- Religious Orders on the forefront
- Caritas Internationalis – C.I. commitment COATNET and Member organizations around the world response
- The U.S. Bishops' Conference (MRS/USCCB) and Catholic Charities USA: have taken on a lead role in responding to the legal, service and pastoral needs of trafficking victims and engage in public advocacy and education in the U.S.
- Dioceses throughout the country through their Catholic Charities and other structures have in many cases been very involved- (Rockville Centre case study- for Latin America regional Catholic organizations)
- In 2002 the Coalition of Catholic Organizations against trafficking was created to coordinate joint learning; education and response to trafficking among U.S. based Catholic organizations.

#### **What Can be Done:**

- **Trafficking Victims Protection Act Reauthorization (TVPA)**

Immediate need- Federal funding for both domestic and international responses to trafficking have always been relatively small for the size and significance of the problem, but have been of great importance in combating trafficking. These funds have made it possible for many organizations and communities to tackle this horrendous problem and these funds are currently threatened.

CRS and MRS/USCCB have worked together to also incorporate improvements into the legislation and are monitoring what provisions remain or can be amended.

- ***Sign up for the legislative network of the Catholics Confront global poverty to receive regular action alerts on the TVPRA***
- ***Contact your Members of Congress*** and express strong support for:
  - Reauthorization of TVPRA; Authorization funding for the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, tasked with assisting governments in responding to urgent needs.
  - Restoration of funds for domestic and international assistance to combat trafficking (1/3 of the proposed funds were cut)
- **Support the USCCB/CRS Catholics Confront Global Poverty**
  - Address many of the factors that increase the vulnerability of people to trafficking,
  - **Join Justice for Immigrants: Catholic Campaign for Comprehensive Immigration Reform**
  - As mentioned a large percentage of those who end up as trafficking victims begin as immigrants with few safe, legal or orderly options to migrate
- **Learn of efforts by MRS/USCCB, CRS, CCUSA** See links to information on the efforts of MRS; CRS; CCUSA
- For those who represent Catholic organizations –become a part of the **Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Trafficking**
- **Find out about local efforts to combat trafficking**
- **Donations:** For those who might be interested in donating to CRS trafficking efforts – there are various options – envelopes in the back, text to Give campaign - text RELIEF to 25383; CRS Website

**CONCLUSION** In no small measure human trafficking can be considered a tragic, yet almost predictable end result of unaddressed economic and social disparities too often slams up against outdated migration policies that respond less to current realities in either receiving or sending countries, than to short term political calculations and societal fears.

It will take sustained and widespread commitment to respond effectively to trafficking and the factors that are driving it. An effective response will require that trafficking not be addressed in a vacuum, but in the context of the economic, political and social decision-making which can increase or decrease the vulnerability of millions of people throughout the world.

Trafficking is a profound and abusive violation of the human dignity and human rights of the individual directly harmed, but also stands as an offense to our shared humanity. Human trafficking is a phenomenon that can be overcome; it must not be allowed to continue to consume the lives of the most vulnerable.