

RESOLUTION AGAINST TRAFFICKING OF HUMAN BEINGS
2011 USCMA Annual Meeting
Miami, Florida

Preamble:

Whereas the 2002 resolution on human trafficking called forth and raised up this worldwide crisis to the awareness of the USCMA membership and the 2006 resolution on child trafficking in Africa called forth and raised up this heartbreaking inhumane treatment of children, encouraging legislature to pass Resolutions 258 and 490 supporting the establishment of a United Nations Trafficking, Slavery, and Exploitation Commission; recognizing the above resolutions, USCMA stands with the Franciscan Federation and the Franciscan Action Network.

Resolution:

Be it resolved that we, as members of the United States Catholic Mission Association (USCMA) in association with the Franciscan Federation and the Franciscan Action Network, upholding the inherent dignity of each human person in the tradition of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi, denounce all forms of human trafficking as criminal acts that violate basic human rights and exploit innocent people. We pledge to work for the elimination of human trafficking and its causes; to advocate for rescue, safety, and justice for trafficked persons; and to demand prosecution of perpetrators.

Background and Rationale:

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery. It is defined as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, providing, or obtaining, by any means, of a person for forced labor, slavery or servitude in any industry or site. It includes sex trafficking, in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or when the person induced to perform a commercial sex act is not yet 18 years of age. According to the U.S. State Department, there are over 12 million adult and child slaves worldwide, 56% of whom are women and girls. After drug trafficking, trafficking of human beings is tied with arms trafficking as the second largest criminal industry in the world. It is also the fastest growing. Traffickers generate billions of dollars in profits every year while victimizing millions of people around the globe.

Victims of trafficking can be found in commercial sex situations, domestic situations (nannies or servants), sweatshop factories, construction, farming and landscaping, fisheries, hotel and tourist industries, panhandling, janitorial services, restaurant services, and in many other circumstances including forced marriages, illegal adoptions and the removal and selling of organs or other body parts.

Poverty and inequality are important factors in making people more vulnerable to being trafficked. As a criminal industry driven by large profits and the low risk of prosecution, trafficking will continue to exist as long as the demand is high and the risks are low. Human Trafficking can be combated in several ways:

1) Eliminate Extreme Poverty: In the long term, wiping out slavery requires helping the world's poor gain greater control over their lives. Mandatory primary and secondary education and effective anti-poverty programs are the first steps. Care must also be taken that trade agreements include enforcement of strict labor standards and anti-trafficking laws.

2) Criminalization & Sanctions: While there are often laws in place prohibiting sexual exploitation and criminalizing trafficking, stronger penalties and increased enforcement are imperative. Prosecutors need more assistance and protection developing cases against traffickers, while victims must be given public assistance in the form of protection, rehabilitation shelters, healthcare, and residency status. The services provided trafficking survivors need to be victim-centered and acknowledge the further trauma caused when trafficked persons are arrested, charged with crimes or offenses, and detained in holding cells and jails.

3) Prevention: Training programs for law enforcement and government officials, public awareness, a warning system (like Amber Alert), and media campaigns have all proven successful against human trafficking.

4) Communication and Cooperation: International law enforcement coordination and cooperation are essential. International NGOs that focus on human trafficking give power and protection to those who are fighting human trafficking locally, by putting pressure on corrupt public officials and observing criminal activity from abroad. Political lobbying, legal aid and funding for non-governmental groups are also vital.

5) Decrease Corruption: Corruption is one of the primary reasons human trafficking and slavery continues. Therefore, public officials must be regularly investigated, held accountable and punished for corruption.

6) Decrease Demand: Human trafficking will continue as long as there is demand for cheap labor, inexpensive consumer products and commercialized sex. The demand side of trafficking includes sweatshop or brothel owners, farmers, and clients of sex workers, and people who hire domestic servants. We recognize the need to be well informed as we make choices concerning our purchasing and investment power. Careful research into products and corporations is required.

We, the members of USCMA, stand with the Franciscans in affirming our relationship with all persons as our brothers and sisters. Following the example of St. Francis who reached out to the poor, oppressed and marginalized in his day, we have special concern for the dignity of all human beings and a call to respond when persons are being oppressed. We aim to transform hatred to love, despair to hope, sadness to joy, and darkness to light for all human trafficked victims.

Therefore, we call for and support local, state, federal and international legislation, policies and enforcement that are compassionate, comprehensive and just. We advocate that trafficked victims be treated with respect and made safe and secure rather than being treated as criminals. We commit ourselves to prayer and advocacy for an end to human trafficking and for respect and justice for all victims.

Call to Respond:

Let us, together with the Members of the Franciscan Federation and the Franciscan Action Network, address the needs of our times, as we respond individually and collectively to the issue of the trafficking of human beings in the United States of America and beyond. Therefore, members are encouraged to:

1. Respond prayerfully, engaging in prayer services, remembrances and offering intercessions during liturgies and on other such occasions.
2. Become better educated about the issues related to Human Trafficking in the U.S. and abroad.
3. Engage in advocacy efforts such as petitions and postcard campaigns, calls, letters and visits to legislators, letters to the editor, nonviolent marches, vigils and demonstrations, media and other advocacy opportunities as they arise.
4. Engage in specific education and advocacy efforts concerning trafficked women and children at sports events, conventions, or other public events.
5. Promote increased education in identification and safe rescue in hospitals, schools, social service agencies, faith-based organizations, motels and other places where human trafficked victims can be rescued and provided with safety.
6. Become aware of our purchasing practices and the use of our investment power by researching the companies we support and the products we consume.
7. Collaborate with appropriate organizations working against human trafficking, by engaging in networking meetings, collective actions, advocacy efforts, and by financial support when possible.