

Statement of Catholic Bishops in Illinois and Leadership Conference of Women Religious Leaders (LCWR) of Illinois: Eradicating Human Trafficking

Nadia, a woman from Eastern Europe, was trafficked to the United States and forced to work seven nights a week for \$35.00 per night cleaning the floors at a Midwestern grocery store chain. Her transportation costs and living expenses were deducted from her pay, and she was forced to live in a small apartment with three men. Despite threats against her, she escaped and found safety at a domestic violence shelter.

The mission of the gospel is to set captives free and to show mercy to our neighbor who is in need. Human trafficking around the world betrays every dimension of personhood and is a modern day form of slavery

The Catholic Bishops in Illinois and LCWR leaders of Illinois call attention to this tragic denial of human rights. We oppose the trafficking of individuals for purposes of sexual exploitation and slave labor. We bring the issue to the forefront in Illinois—a state recognized already as a forerunner in criminalizing and prosecuting violators of human trafficking. We seek to raise awareness of the issue and to promote a response of compassionate assistance to victims in their need.

In collaboration with Illinois Rescue and Restore Campaign, launched in 2005 to combat labor and sex trafficking, Catholic institutions are urged to participate in programs aimed at assisting victims. Many of these victims are uneducated juveniles or young adults living in desperate economic situations who are lured by false claims of job opportunities. We commend the state and social service agencies of Illinois for diligence in seeking to provide physical and psychological rehabilitation services, shelters, legal assistance and other measures to help victims recover their dignity and reintegrate into society.

Human trafficking involves the movement of people through violence, deception or coercion for the purpose of forced labor, servitude, slavery-like practices and prostitution. At any point in time, approximately 2.5 million persons world-wide are victims of trafficking. At least one-third of them are trafficked for economic purposes other than sexual exploitation. Human trafficking is a global phenomenon. It is the fastest growing means by

which helpless people are used to generate profit for those engaged in unethical business behavior.

The sex trade continues unabated due to constant demand. A countless number of people are enslaved year after year in destination communities—urban centers and small towns alike—across the United States. The traders of human trafficking victims often outwit new law enforcement practices by moving victims from hotspots to other regions of the state or across state lines to avoid prosecution. By engaging more with legislative and law enforcement authorities, we help eradicate this scourge that treats human beings as objects.

To eliminate the estimated world-wide \$32 billion market of illicit human trafficking, we encourage pastors, church workers, Catholics and all people of good will to:

- Pray for human trafficking victims worldwide
- Become educated and aware of the issue
- Reflect/act on behalf of this critical concern
- Support those already assisting survivors
- Promote coordinated educational efforts to raise public awareness and prevent and eliminate human trafficking
- Participate in legislative advocacy efforts that promote the dignity of trafficked persons
- Join the Illinois Rescue and Restore annual April Outreach Day promoting an end to human trafficking:
dhs.ilrescueandrestore@illinois.gov.
- Publicize the toll free, National Human Trafficking hotline for victims' assistance: **888.3737.888**.
- Observe annually January 11 as National Human Trafficking Awareness Day

We, the Catholic bishops, women religious, and the Catholic laity of Illinois, are committed to ending this modern day form of slavery. We ask God to bless all our efforts to develop a comprehensive approach to human trafficking that eliminates the root causes, supports the survivors and actively seeks to assist them in healing from this horrendous crime.

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