



## REPORT

### ***BUILDING A NETWORK:***

### ***The Prophetic Role of Women Religious in the Fight against Trafficking in Persons***

***October 15 – 20, 2007***

***Rome, Italy***

An important international seminar was held on 15-20 October 2007 in the residence of the Sisters of Maria SS. Bambina, located just off of St. Peter's Square. Thirty-three religious women of 25 congregations from 26 countries of all continents attended, and came together to publicly issue a joint statement as well as launch the first ever international network of women religious against trafficking in persons (INRATIP). Additional details include:

#### **Participants came from:**

- **Eastern Europe:** Albania – Croatia – Poland – Romania – Slovenia – Ukraine
- **Western Europe:** Belgium – France – Germany – Spain – Holland – Italy – England
- **America:** Canada – Mexico – United States – Columbia – Peru

- **Africa:** Ghana – Nigeria – South Africa – Kenya
- **Asia:** India – Indonesia – Thailand
- **Australia**

The seminar was conceived and organised by USMI's Counter -Trafficking Office, in collaboration with and financed from the U.S. Embassy to the Holy See, with Public Affairs Coordinator Amy Roth serving as a co-organizer.<sup>1</sup>

The theme of the meeting was **“Building a Network: The Prophetic Role of Women Religious in the Fight against Trafficking in Persons”**.

**The meeting had the following *objectives*:**

- To highlight the value of our prophetic presence in the world and in the Church; to give concrete answers in today's emergencies by revitalising and carrying out our own charisma at the service of vulnerable and defenceless persons - especially women and minors.
- To create or strengthen a network of communication among the various Conferences of the Religious in countries of origin, transit and destination of women and minors who are sold and bought as goods. Without these specific points of reference for an effective collaboration, it is difficult to understand the phenomenon of trafficking and to prevent it and find adequate solutions.<sup>2</sup>

The seminar was the occasion for several meaningful moments, which enriched all the participants. The youngest was 28 years old and the oldest 76, but they were all united in the same passion for Christ and for women in difficulty.

**We especially remember key moments from the seminar:**

- ✓ The Welcome Ceremony and official Opening of the seminar, introduced by each participant presenting the flag of her respective country.
- ✓ The meeting with the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI in St. Peter's Square.
- ✓ The Friday afternoon session open to the public, followed by a press conference attended by Vatican and secular media, where final results of this important meeting were shared, and proved it was unique of its kind.
- ✓ The launching of the first international network of the religious against trafficking in human beings (**INRATIP**).

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<sup>1</sup> Our initial intention was that of organising a meeting exclusively for the Religious who work in European countries, mainly for those in the East, where Italy is more involved, to create a better collaboration and network among the religious in countries of origin, transit and destination. When we presented the project to be financed by the donor, we were requested to add other countries from Africa, Asia and America and involve conferences of the religious in their respective countries, thus giving the seminar an international openness and visibility.

<sup>2</sup> See the USMI site for the text of a report by Sr. Eugenia Bonetti about the International Seminar. [http://www.usmi.pcn.net/convegni/2007/relazione\\_bonetti\\_ita.pdf](http://www.usmi.pcn.net/convegni/2007/relazione_bonetti_ita.pdf)

- ✓ The presentation of a Public Statement, prepared by the participants in collaboration, and read aloud to the media, then handed over to different representatives of the government, the Church and the people of God, as well as to the victims themselves and to their exploiters.<sup>3</sup>
- ✓ The Closing Mass, celebrated the morning after the official close of the seminar, in the Vatican Grottos, before the Tomb of St. Peter and at the side of Pope John Paul II, presided over by Archbishop Marchetto, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples and by Father Trabucco, USG Secretary General. At the end, all participants received a Papal flag and blessed rosary as a gift and souvenir of this special and important milestone shared together.

## Conclusion

Our sincere thanks goes to the staff of the U.S. Embassy to the Holy See, which financed and sponsored this milestone and enormous project, as well as to all those who in various ways have supported and encouraged us. We are sure that the labour of these days will change into hope for all those persons who are waiting for liberation from their chains of slavery. This is how our religious and missionary life will be able to fully express its prophetic role in today's world: by working in "communion" and not in competition, with all the forces that work for the least of God's people and for advancing the Kingdom of God here on earth.

*Sr. Eugenia & Amy*




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<sup>3</sup> For further information and photos, see the USMI site:  
<http://www.usmi.pcn.net/convegni/15-20ottobreseminario.pdf>