

Info Alert 140

"It is time for united action from all of us, so that women and girls from around the world can live free from harassment, harmful practices, and all other forms of violence,"

-UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres

Education: Human Trafficking, Gender-based Violence

Trafficking in persons is a grave violation of human rights. Approximately 40.3 million people are victims of modern-day slavery around the world. Refugees and unaccompanied children are some of the most vulnerable targets of labor and sex traffickers. As people committed to ending this scourge and welcoming all who are in need, one of the best ways to prevent vulnerable women, men, and children from becoming victims is by supporting our neighbors--migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, and asylum seekers, protecting our young Dreamers in the U.S., and advocating for full and robust funding for programs that reduce poverty and vulnerability. (Programs like CHIP, EITC, etc., information on these were included in many earlier Info Alerts).

New immigrants may be susceptible to trafficking because of their precarious social and economic circumstances. Unfortunately, at a time when a record number of people are on the move--forced from their homes by violence of all kinds including poverty, armed conflict, abuse and persecution, the U.S. is woefully unprepared to deal with the threat of human trafficking. Many positions in the State Department which aid in anti-trafficking efforts in our country and internationally are *not filled*. The administration plans to **defund** international agencies like the World Food Program and federal programs housed in the State and Justice Departments, thus undercutting anti-trafficking efforts and feeding into the hands of those who exploit migrants and refugees. **(Call your elected officials in protest: 1-202-224-3121).**

Close to home, The Philadelphia Inquirer (1/29/18) reported on "Massage parlors as sites of sex trafficking," with startling and frightening facts. A non-profit's new report says 600 are located in Pa. and N.J., among the top 10 in the U.S. The Polaris report states that I-95 plays a role. Women, often from Asia, lured with false promises, are brought in vans through New York and taken in vans and taxis along I-95 to Pa. and N.J. and points farther south and west. At least 9,000 massage businesses nationwide are suspected to be fronts for sex trafficking. Of this number, about 260 are located in Pa. and about 370 in N.J., ranking them seventh and fifth among states with the most massage-parlor trafficking. **How tragic! But, we can act.**

February is Trafficking Awareness Month. On Thursday, the feast of St. Josephine Bakhita, the USCCB is hosting an Inter-Religious Prayer Service to remember survivors and victims of human trafficking at Trinity Washington University with prayer and reflection. Why not join in prayer in your convents, places of ministry, parish churches?

A separate attachment on "End Human Trafficking" is included as our Prayer for this Info Alert.

Please print and use in anyway you can on the feast of St. Josephine Bakhita, patron saint of victims of trafficking. Help to raise awareness about this horrific evil.

Prayer: See separate attachment, "End Human Trafficking"

Action: Call your elected officials to act to safeguard victims of trafficking by retaining federal programs that act on behalf of the vulnerable, the poor, runaway teens, and immigrants.

Remind them of the extreme necessity of passing the Dreamers Act now. Share this information and this number with others who will act in the name of our God who reminds us of the dignity of every human person. Make sure officials stand up for our human dignity. **(1-202-224-3121)**

"Solidarity means confronting the destructive effects of the rule of money: forced displacement, painful immigration, human trafficking, drugs, war, violence." -Pope Francis