

ANNEX II

Difficulties and Successful Practices in Facilitating a New Life for Persons Trafficked to Italy

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Paper presented at

The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences

Human Trafficking: Issues Beyond Criminalization

17 – 21 April 2015

Casina Pio IV, Vatican City

1. Community of Pope John XXIII

Thank you very much for calling us to discuss this issue.

The *Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII* Association was founded by Father Oreste Benzi, a Catholic Priest, in Italy in the early 70s. On 25th of March 2004, the solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, the Pontifical Council for the Laity - according to pontifical law - confirmed the recognition of the *Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII* Association as a private international association of the faithful with juridical personality. Its specific mission is to *directly share* life with the least and to *remove the causes* that generate injustice. We are known for our *Family Homes*, residential and educational communities, organised like natural families. It is characterized by the stable presence of two parental figures – mother and father – who choose to share their life in a continuous and self-giving way with people in need. The deep intuition is simple: the family is the most important relational system. All people have the right to belong to a family. Then, we give a family to those who don't have one.

In 2006 the Association *Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII* was granted Special Consultative Status within the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. Today the Association is present in 32 countries on five continents. In order to respond to the needs of the poorest, the Community of Pope John XXIII is continuously looking for new ways to directly share life. This is one of the reasons of the growth and spreading of the Community in the world.

Among the different activities of the Community, there is a constant work for the liberation of victims of trafficking and forced prostitution.

2. The commitment against trafficking in human beings

In 1989, Father Oreste Benzi met a prostitute at Rimini railway station: this encounter revealed him the horror of prostitution and the state of oppression hidden behind it. During the night, the streets of the town were overcrowded with girls who prostituted themselves. The phenomenon was growing dramatically, without any kind of intervention, as it was considered just another tourist attraction.

When Father Oreste Benzi went on the streets to meet the girls, he used to ask them: *“Do you love Jesus? Yes! You are the temple of God!”* Few words were enough for him to see their profound dignity. Thanks to these meetings, among prayer and tears, our unceasing work for the liberation of the slaves started up.

In 25 years, we have freed more than 7,000 persons from sexual slavery. Central and local government co-finance only about 10% of the amount of money we spend every year to support our actions.

Italy is considered both a country of destination and transit for enforced prostitution. It is estimated that in Italy there are about 120,000 victims. Most of the phenomenon happens on the streets (65%), but indoor prostitution is also relevant (apartments, nightclubs or massage clubs). It is also estimated that 37% of the victims are children. Victims of trafficking mainly come from Nigeria, Romania, East European countries, South America and China.

3. The model of intervention

Our model of intervention takes three steps: emergency (street outreach), first welcoming and rehabilitation.

First, we try to free women who prostitute themselves. We operate through “street outreach teams”. They are small teams (3-4 persons, with at least one woman) that go on the streets, at night, in order to meet as many women forced into prostitution as possible and to propose to them to exit from the oppression they are living. Currently we have 21 teams, with about one hundred volunteers going on the road every week throughout Italy. Street teams usually operate once a week.

The way we operate is very simple. We introduce ourselves and explain what we do to try and find a good connection with the girls. We try to share their sufferings, so that they can have their dignity back. Dignity comes from relationships. Therefore, we stop and simply talk with them face to face, person to person. We stay with them on trafficked streets full of people watching them; on dark dangerous roads at the margin of the cities. Then we explain them that they have the chance to change their situation of slavery. The aim is always to offer them our help for a path of liberation. We leave a phone number (free line) in order to keep in touch. Through street outreach teams we also monitor the overall situation of this social phenomenon. We try to keep a

relationship with the people we contacted in the previous weeks. The victims rarely decide to escape from slavery when first contacted. More frequently, they decide to leave the road only after the establishment of a relationship of trust with our volunteers. I will say this again: our aim is to free the victims. It has nothing to do with harm reduction: condom delivery, medical check-up, abortion. Unfortunately, we observe that many organizations in emergency work only try to alleviate the state of oppression of the victims. But they do not work to eliminate it.

Secondly, women who decide to exit from prostitution are welcomed in our family homes. We have about 300 family homes and 5 shelters throughout Italy. Therefore, it is simple to welcome victims of sexual slavery far from their place of prostitution, for safety reasons. In fact, pimps strictly control their victims. During our street outreach work women's mobiles often ring. When a victim is welcomed in our protection program, her pimp starts to look for her. We try to meet their primary needs (medical, psychological, legal assistance, etc.). We also work in order to obtain a special humanitarian residence permit (through art. 18, Italian Law 286/1998).

We always ensure a family context. Family homes welcome children, disabled people, the elderly and other marginalized people. The family is the most important relational system. It responds to our natural need for relationship. Through this relationship we restore confidence; through this confidence we restore self-esteem.

Then, in a family context we give back dignity to victims of human trafficking. We provide educational and job training opportunities too, so that they can become independent and start a new life. When a person has achieved a good degree of economic empowerment, she is ready to start a new life. We do not abandon them at this point, but we keep in touch with them (follow-up). This is crucial: victims of trafficking are vulnerable; therefore, they need a support network - even after they have started a new life.

Our family homes network often represents this kind of help. A rehabilitation program lasts 12-18 months.

Finally, we must say that sometimes we meet women who have suffered so much abuse and trauma that restarting a new life is not possible. This happens when psychological or physical traumas are permanent. In these cases, we guarantee them a lifelong welcome in our families.

4. Achievements

In 2014, we had 21 outreach teams all over Italy with almost a hundred volunteers. We had around 10,000 contacts with 3,500 victims of human trafficking. We offered each one the chance of instant freedom and the possibility to report their exploiters. We welcomed 200 survivors and 25 children with them. Most of the victims are women, some even underage. Men make up 25% of the total; we welcomed some transsexual persons too. During last year we completed 63 social reintegration programs and four

repatriations. In 25 years the *Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII* has assisted around 7,000 survivors of human trafficking.

5. Difficulties

Some years ago, there were high risks due to the pimps' reprisals. Fr. Oreste received several death threats for his commitment. Today, thanks to police forces too, these risks have been reduced. However, freeing women from a state of slavery is still a hard task.

For example, with Nigerian women, we face considerable difficulties in obtaining their documents, which is the first step to build a new autonomous life in Italy. In fact, when Nigerian women arrive in Europe, they usually have fake documents, so the Nigerian Embassy rejects the request for a new passport. Without a passport you cannot obtain a residence permit. Without a residence permit you cannot have a future in Italy. Moreover, unfortunately, within this community there is a widespread belief in voodoo. The threat of voodoo practices is an effective deterrent for any woman who thinks of escaping prostitution.

Eastern European pimps have changed their attitude towards women. Their violent attitude has now become a slyer kind of exploitation. Pimps give a share of their earnings to the girls, so that they are induced to think that they take part in the game, that it is a good job. In this way identifying the victims becomes more challenging. But they are always victims. We must remember that many Eastern European countries, such as Romania, come from communist regimes. Here we find widespread poverty and high rates of intra-familial violence. Poverty and violence make women vulnerable. A lot of women have children in their home country, and they are the only breadwinners of the family. Furthermore, they do not need residence permits because they are European citizens. They often decide to stop prostituting themselves only when they are exhausted after many years on the streets. We observed an upturn in victims coming from Albania, who can easily move to Italy because of the candidate status granted by the European Union.

We estimated that indoor prostitution in Italy is around 35% of the total. In this case, the women mainly come from South America and the Far East. The women we have met have suffered child abuse in many cases. The Chinese racket is well organised: the girls do not have a direct contact with their clients, but there is a middle man (or a middle woman). The Chinese women, who often work in shady wellness centres, do not speak any language except Chinese, so contacting them is quite hard.

Bringing indoor prostitution to the surface presents different problems: we need to examine sexual ads and pretend to be clients in order to contact the women. It involves a greater risk, especially for volunteers. However, if the clients can reach them, so can we.

These are the common elements that we have noticed in all the different kinds of forced

prostitution mentioned above:

- The girls are younger and younger: their average age is around 18-20, also they are often underage. This is a specific request of the clients who often look for teenage girls, and then trespass into paedophilia. There is an increasing number of cases on the news about child prostitution, also involving high ranking personalities.
- The high turnover of people in prostitution. This has a double aim: it impedes the relationship of trust with volunteers/social workers mentioned above, thus it prevents women from escaping. Often the girls just disappear after a few contacts with our volunteers. The second aim is to meet the clients' requests for new "stuff".
- An increase in the clients' sexual deviance. In addition to the request for teenage girls we have observed another one: the request for pregnant women. A client is ready to pay four times as much. In general terms the client has a relationship of supremacy.
- The traumas and sorrow suffered by the women. Many women decide to leave prostitution only when they can't go on anymore. These people have suffered enormous traumas that we try to face in our family homes, also with the help of specialised psychologists. However, some of them are so hurt that they will never totally recover.
- Lost dignity. These women have been offended, beaten, raped. They are ashamed of what they have done. Sure, everybody knows that. But we have observed a particular side to it: they often feel worthless, so they give up thinking they can be free. It's a loss of hope. Their hope has been stolen.

6. Advocacy work

We are aware that our commitment is a drop in the bucket. That's why we strive to uproot the causes that produce this injustice - the world's oldest injustice.

Since the 90s, Fr. Oreste knew that to stop the phenomenon we had to hit the exploiters - there are two types of exploiters: the pimps and the clients. So, the fight against criminals isn't enough, we must tackle the demand. In 2003, our Association filed at the Chamber of Deputies a draft law of popular initiative which aimed at suppressing the demand through the legal punishment of the customer. In a few months our Association collected 110,000 signatures. Unfortunately, that draft was never discussed by the Chamber.

In October 2014 we held a conference at the Chamber of Deputies to endorse a new bill proposing the prohibition of prostitution through the punishment of the customer, which is now called the "Nordic- Swedish model". This proposal recognizes the client's responsibility in the enslavement of trafficking victims. Basically, if there were no clients, there would be no people forced into prostitution. We are aware that this is one of the key points for combating human trafficking, as already indicated since 2000 by the

Palermo Protocols: *“States Parties shall adopt (...) measures to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons that leads to trafficking”* (art. 9, p. 5). Even Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament recalls the above-mentioned sentence and states that *“Member States shall consider taking measures to establish as a criminal offense the use of services which are the objects of exploitation”*.

In Italy, public debate addresses prostitution mainly as a question of public order. Unfortunately, in the Italian Parliament there are too many law proposals that envisage the legal regulation of prostitution. Some biased parliamentarians believe that first they must protect women's self-determination: women's “free choice” in prostituting themselves. In their idea, human trafficking is only a question of criminal prosecution of organised crime. Moreover, the idea of gaining in tax revenues from prostitution is enticing, especially in times of economic crisis.

We see a mix of ignorance and hypocrisy. We are often called to bring our field-based experience. We always point out that legalised prostitution:

- a) Fosters demand;
- b) Makes the identification of human trafficking victims more difficult;
- c) Does not facilitate prosecution of the pimps;
- d) Does not increase tax revenue;
- e) Does not reduce violence against women;
- f) Does not improve health safety;
- g) Increases social costs.

Therefore, we are trying to promote a public opinion movement to urge our leaders to adopt legislation based on the Swedish model. We know that the loud, clear support of the Italian Church is crucial to achieve this. *“The poor can't wait”* as Fr. Oreste Benzi used to say. He fought strongly for these girls' freedom. We are confident that he continues to support the cause of these women and that their cry for freedom will finally be heard.

Thank you.