



The Catholic Women's League of Canada Position Paper

TITLE: Human Trafficking

POSITION STATEMENT

The enslavement and exploitation of people through human trafficking is a violation of their fundamental human rights to freedom and security of person. The Catholic Women's League of Canada, in accordance with Catholic Social Teaching (CST), recognizes that human trafficking targets the most vulnerable in our society for the monetary gain of those who exploit others. Human trafficking violates foundational principles of social teaching, in particular:

- the life and dignity of the human person
- the rights and responsibilities of the human person
- the dignity of work and the rights of workers
- the option for the poor and the vulnerable

BACKGROUND

Human trafficking is a violation of human rights, as well as an affront to the dignity of the human person. Pope Francis refers to it as “an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ” (Participants). While it is the individual who suffers the exploitation of trafficking, all of society suffers when the dignity of the human person is devalued. On April 8, 2024, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith published a declaration on human dignity, *Dignitas Infinita (Infinite Dignity)*, which further supports human trafficking as “among the grave violations of human dignity” (par. 41). It warns “that we must avoid every temptation to fall into a declarationist nominalism that would assuage our consciences. We need to ensure that our institutions are truly effective in the struggle against all these scourges” (par. 42).

The United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.” recognizing the fundamental human right to freedom of a person. The UN Palermo Protocol, which Canada signed and ratified in 2002, strives to prevent, suppress and punish human trafficking with a comprehensive international approach. The protocol describes human trafficking as the act of recruitment, transport, harbouring, or receipt of a person using the means of threat, force, coercion, abduction, fraud or deception for the purpose of controlling for exploitation. Exploitation takes the form of prostitution or other sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery or servitude, or the removal of organs. (Protocol)

Globally, human trafficking has increased exponentially year by year and includes forced criminality, forced begging, sham marriages, human trafficking for the purpose of pornography, live cams, and live remote sexual abuse. Thirty-one percent of these cases involved people with disabilities. (Organization 6) The reality of human trafficking in Canada is that women and girls are the predominant victims, with 94% of those exploited being female. (Canada, Statistics) Trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is the most common reason for trafficking in Canada. Our nation has been identified as a source, destination, and transit country for victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and forced labour. (Canada, National

Action Plan)

Canada has created a National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking as well as the National Strategy To Combat Human Trafficking 2019-2024. This comprehensive strategy notes that those who are at greatest risk of trafficking include members of vulnerable or marginalized groups. The Native Women's Association states that this gendered discrimination "has forced Indigenous women and girls into dangerous and precarious social and economic conditions, which in turn has made them more vulnerable to different kinds of violence. This includes situations of exploitation and human trafficking." As a result, Indigenous women and girls are overrepresented in trafficking and sexual exploitation in Canada. (Roudometkina and Wakeford 3)

Migrants and new immigrants are also at risk. Alice Lee and Suzanne Jay of Asian Women for Equality have identified ways that women are manipulated in "body rub" parlours, such as confiscation of passports, constant surveillance, debt bondage and provision of drugs for control. (Heinz and King, 61) Language barriers and a lack of understanding of local laws and worker's rights can also make immigrants vulnerable. A survivor of trafficking, Timea Nagy describes how she and other young women were lured from Europe and Asia through supposed employment agencies, only to end up in the sex trade and labour markets. (Nagy and Moroney)

Children and youth are particularly vulnerable. Covenant House in Toronto identified several ways young people are particularly at risk. Unstable family lives, especially for children in care, and lower socioeconomic status, along with past trauma, contribute to making a child vulnerable to manipulation by traffickers. Covenant House states that "Traffickers are masters at identifying and capitalizing upon vulnerabilities. They look for people who appear insecure or lack a strong network of friends or attention from family." Online luring has become a significant problem, with children and youth spending much more time online today. Any child can be targeted in this way (Covenant).

This crime is perpetrated by organized criminal networks or individuals (Department of Justice "What Is Human Trafficking?"). Some victims may be trafficked by a family member or intimate partner (Public Safety "About Human"). Human trafficking is a "low risk/high reward activity" because of the difficulty in detecting and prosecuting this crime. (Department of Justice, "What Is Human?") It is highly lucrative, as a single victim can be sold many times. Profits from human trafficking are estimated at USD 236 billion per year. (International Labour Organization)

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe states that "All OSCE participating States are politically or legally obligated to discourage the demand that fosters trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation..." (Office 11). Canada has included human trafficking offences in the Criminal Code (Legislative, sec. 279.01) and Canada's Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act addresses the demand for paid sex that results in human trafficking to fill that demand. (Canada, Justice)

Citing Pope Francis, "...we are facing a global phenomenon that exceeds the competence of any one community or country..." (XLVIII). Combating human trafficking requires addressing systemic reasons for vulnerability to exploitation, such as poverty, abuse and neglect, along with legislation and enforcement of anti-trafficking laws.

SUPPORTIVE ACTIONS

- Be knowledgeable and supportive of church teachings such as the Vatican’s “[Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking.](#)” and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops’ “[For Freedom Christ has set us Free: Pastoral Letter on Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation in Canada](#)”
- Stay informed through online research such as the [National Human Trafficking Education Centre](#), [Defend Dignity](#), guest speakers and hosting events.
- Monitor and act upon government legislation and regulations relating to human trafficking and exploitation of persons.
- Participate in the church’s International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking (February 8) and Canada’s National Human Trafficking Awareness Day (February 22).
- Advocate for funding for non-profit organizations supporting survivors.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

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STATUS

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