



International Solidarity Reflection

School Sisters of Notre Dame

Shalom

Trafficking in Persons

July 2024

Introduction

Millions of people are on the move, fleeing persecution, authoritarian regimes, political corruption, gang violence, extreme poverty, and climate disasters. Will they find the security they seek for themselves and their families? Will we welcome them as Jesus would? Or will we label them “other,” avert our eyes, and allow them to be abused by those who would deny their dignity and exploit their labor?

Call to Prayer

Heart of God, full of love, we give you glory for the blessings you have bestowed on us. You told us the stories of our ancestors who were forced to flee their homelands—Abraham, Sarah, Ruth, and Moses. You shared with us the experience of the Holy Family, whose life was filled with unplanned travel and flight from enemies. You gave us the example of your son, who welcomed strangers and shared bread with outcasts. God of abundant compassion, break open our hearts that we might embrace the challenge to build a community where all are welcome—a community of one mind and one heart.

Experience

Cristian Eduardo is a Latino immigrant, a member of the LGBTQ+ community, a person living with HIV, and a gifted human being dealing with the life-long consequences of forced migration and human trafficking. He is a survivor of international and domestic sex and labor trafficking and a passionate advocate for those marginalized and abused.

As a young man in his early 20s fearing persecution in his home country of Mexico, Cristian fled to Canada, where he then found himself trafficked. He again was trafficked in the United States after escaping from Canada.

Cristian speaks movingly of the innumerable barriers that prevented him from escaping his traffickers, even while he feared for his life. If he went to the police, he faced the possibility of being deported because of his immigration status or imprisoned because of his involvement in illegal activity. His fate was continued emotional, physical, and sexual abuse.

Cristian is just one of thousands of survivors of forced migration and human trafficking. They are people of color, people living with HIV, and LGBTQ+ individuals. They are too easily ignored and too often exploited because they are “other.” They are the foreigner, the outsider, the stranger, and so their abuse continues.

Reflection

The nature of human trafficking makes it difficult to accurately describe its scope and number its cost. While the [2022 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#) reports that in 2020,

approximately 53,800 people were living in conditions of human trafficking on any given day, the data only reflects trafficked persons who were in contact with authorities. It does not reflect the hidden number of victims of commercial sexual exploitation, forced labor, and forced marriage.

Traffickers thrive where vulnerability is high, where people are desperate, and their options are limited. People on the move and recent immigrants are at particular risk of exploitation by traffickers because they live in the shadows. The U.N. International Organization for Migration estimates that there were [281 million international migrants in 2020](#). They are refugees, asylum seekers, labor migrants and those displaced by conflict or natural disaster. They are easy prey for those who would steal their labor and deny their dignity.

The adverse circumstances that force people to flee their homes can make migrants susceptible to exploitative recruitment from abroad. Migration routes too often lead travelers into the hands of organized trafficking networks. Their very status as migrants, especially irregular migrants, exposes them to possible negative legal consequences, including fines, detention, or deportation. “Moreover, irregularity often leads migrants to work in sectors prone to exploitation, such as in the fishing industry in South-East Asia, the agricultural sector in Europe, and construction jobs in Northern America.” ([World Migrant Report 2022](#), Chapter 10, 258)

Action

You can break the link between forced migration and human trafficking. Your actions can and do make a difference!

1. Tell the story about the connection between forced migration and human trafficking.
2. Advocate for those marginalized by our attitudes and laws. Contact your elected officials to express support for policies that protect and empower migrants and trafficking survivors.
3. Reread Pope Francis’ 2021 Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, “*Towards an Ever Wider We*” stressing that an ever wider “we” will help renew the human family, build a future of justice and peace, and ensure that no one is left behind.
4. Offer your time and skills to local organizations that support migrants and trafficking survivors; teach language classes, provide legal assistance, or help with resettlement.
5. Use social media to raise awareness about this issue and counteract negative stereotypes.
6. Support efforts to integrate migrants and trafficking survivors into the community.
7. Join your efforts to those of others. Become a member of the Alliance to End Human Trafficking.

Closing Prayer

God of all nations, cultures, and peoples, we pray for our brothers and sisters forced to flee their homes and make the difficult journey in search of safety. Help us to see you in the face of each stranger and to hear your voice in the cry of every child. They ask only for the chance to live free from fear, free from violence, and free from the poverty that robs their souls.

God of abundant welcome, open the doors of our hearts and our homes. Give us the grace to welcome these newcomers as we would welcome you. Grant, we pray that we may be a community of compassion and encounter with you, the living God. May all those people on the move find welcome, protection, opportunity, and the invitation to join their lives with ours. We pray this, in the name of the One who loves us all unconditionally and who calls us to do the same.