

Statement of Catholic Bishops and Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR)
of Illinois: Eradicating Human Trafficking

The Catholic Bishops and LCWR leaders of Illinois issue a statement that supports human rights by opposing the trafficking of individuals for purposes of sexual exploitation and slave labor. We bring the issue to the forefront in Illinois—a state recognized already as a forerunner in the United States in terms of criminalizing and prosecuting violators of human trafficking. We seek to enhance awareness of the issue while actively responding to victims by providing an accessible means of crisis intervention.

In collaboration with Illinois' Rescue and Restore Campaign, launched in 2005 to combat labor and sex trafficking, Catholic institutions are urged to participate in programs aimed at assisting victims. Many of these victims are uneducated juveniles or young adults living in desperate economic situations who are lured by false claims of job opportunities. To eliminate the estimated \$32 billion market that engages in illicit human trafficking of individuals, we encourage pastors, church workers, Catholics and all people of good will to become educated and aware of the issue, and to reflect and act on behalf of this critical concern. We commend Illinois (both the state and social service agencies) for this diligence in providing physical and psychological rehabilitation services, shelters, legal assistance and other measures to help victims to recover their dignity and to reintegrate into society.

At any point in time, approximately 2.5 million persons are victims of trafficking, at least one-third of whom are trafficked for economic purposes other than sexual exploitation. Human trafficking is, therefore, a global phenomenon and the fastest growing means by which people are forced into slavery, generating profit for those engaged in unethical business behavior. Human trafficking involves the movement of people through violence, deception or coercion for the purpose of forced labor, servitude, slavery-like practices and prostitution.

The sex trade continues unabated due to constant demand. A countless number of people are enslaved and destroyed year after year in receiving communities—urban centers and small towns alike—across the United States. The traders of human trafficking victims have grown savvy about new law enforcement practices, moving victims from hotspots to other regions of the state or across state lines to avoid prosecution. By engaging more with our authorities, we are called upon to contribute to the eradication of this scourge by opposing any attempt to transform a human being into an object.

There is a need to give voice and provide better protection to the victims of trafficking both in the U.S. and in other countries. As such, we recognize the benefit of the enhancement of the toll free National Human Trafficking hotline 888.3737.888 for victims for immediate assistance. We urge the availability and access to this number in various public venues. We also encourage the facilitation of coordinated educational efforts to prevent and eliminate human trafficking as well as raise awareness among the public at large around this issue.

We encourage persons of good will to pray for human trafficking victims worldwide on a regular basis, to observe the annual National Human Trafficking Awareness Day and to participate in legislative advocacy efforts that promote the dignity of trafficked persons. We also support those already courageously assisting survivors.

We are committed to ending this modern day form of slavery. Human trafficking demands our concerted efforts to prevent and eliminate the ongoing practice of trading in human lives. We need to tackle the root causes to eradicate trafficking, support the survivors and actively seek to assist them in healing from this horrendous crime.