



CCME-Caritas Europa Press Release

Combating Trafficking in women: Victims need exit options and long-term residence titles

Visit of Christian anti-trafficking network in Italy underlines need for comprehensive victims assistance

Representatives of Christian organisations from Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Italy and Romania have been visiting Palermo from 13th to 16th March in order to learn how churches and assistance organisations are active in defending the rights of victims of trafficking in women. The visit was the second one in a series of exchange visits between Christian organisations from all over Europe, which take place in the context of the „Christian Action and networking against Trafficking in women (CAT)“ project. The CAT project has been launched by the Brussels-based Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and Caritas Europa. It aims at improving the capacity of Christian organisations and their partners to combat trafficking in women by building a European network. The project receives funding from the STOP Programme of the European Commission.

During the stay, participants learnt about the situation of victims of trafficking in Sicily. The situation in Sicily is characterised by a big number of women being trafficked into prostitution across the Mediterranean. A high number of women affected come from Sub-Saharan Africa, especially Nigeria. Often they are kept as slaves of the trafficking networks through debt bondage and the terror of destructive cults, especially Voodoo. A judge told the group about the difficulties to persecute the traffickers for enslavement of these women as victims often refrain from testifying as a result of this terror.

The participants learnt about the efforts of the Protestant parishes and related NGOs in Palermo to offer concrete exit options for victims of trafficking. This exit option includes establishing small income-generating activities. The group visited a restaurant, which is an example of such income-generating activities. Participants also learnt about the importance of the churches' public expressions of solidarity with the victims. The visit was the occasion to meet with a big number of local activists, who are combating trafficking in Human Beings in Sicily. These activists so far had little connection with European networks and expressed their appreciation for the creation of a Europe-wide platform of exchange. At the same time the meeting underlined the need for improved funding for local, regional and national initiatives against Trafficking in Human Beings.

The group also met for an exchange of views with Giuseppe di Lello, who is Member of the European Parliament from Palermo and member of the European Parliament's Committee on Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs.

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Special attention was given to the legal situation in Italy. Italian Aliens Law foresees the possibility for long-term residence titles for foreign citizens in a situation of abuse or severe exploitation. Participants from other countries underlined that it would be extremely helpful for their assistance work to establish similar provisions in their countries.

In an evaluation of the visit CCME moderator Annemarie Dupré said: „The human dignity of women is violated when they are trafficked. We need to open up practical ways for restoring their human dignity. We can only do this if these women can freely decide if they want to stay in Italy or return home. Practical approach needs to be supported by a workable legal structure for residence permits. Any legal framework, which forces former victims to return, runs the risk to violate their human dignity once again”.

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