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Combating trafficking in human beings: "victory of Gospel is victory over slavery"

Christian anti-trafficking workshop in Kiev underlines role of churches in former USSR countries

Churches in the countries of the former Soviet Union are emerging as key actors in the fight against trafficking in human beings. This was the conclusion of a workshop in Kiev/Ukraine, which brought together churches from Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine in Kiev from 2nd to 6th October.

Invited by the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), the workshop, "Current activities and challenges in Churches' work against trafficking", brought together participants from churches and Christian agencies from countries of the former USSR. Some of the participants already have established anti-trafficking programmes; others are looking to start work in the area of anti-trafficking. The hosting All-Ukrainian Charity Fund "Faith, Hope, Love" and the World Council of Churches' Eastern Europe Office were co-organisers of the event which continued the work of the European network "Christian Action and Networking against Trafficking in Human Beings" (CAT), which CCME started five years ago.

During the workshop, participants discussed the theological and socio-ethical foundations of Christian work against trafficking. Archpriest Andreij Tkachov of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) reminded the participants that often the providence of God had been shown in those who were sold like slaves, e.g. in the person of Joseph sold into slavery by his own brothers. Christians have every reason to be optimistic when engaging against contemporary forms of slavery, as "the victory of the Gospel is a victory over slavery" he explained.

Churches from Ukraine and Moldova reported about their growing involvement in the struggle against trafficking. They underlined how they have managed to sensitise clergy and laity in their own churches and at the same time develop operational programmes. In both countries, the challenges in the fight against trafficking in human beings made it necessary to involve all partners and develop networks of cooperation. Looking at future perspectives, participants agreed on future exchanges between churches in the region in order to strengthen each other's work.

Representatives of the International Organisation for Migration and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe explained how, for their organisations, churches in the countries of the former Soviet Union are becoming important partners.

Torsten Moritz of CCME commented: "In recent years, it has become obvious that churches in Eastern Europe often have a central role for preventing and combating trafficking, for example in rural areas, where no NGO is present. We have seen very encouraging signs of work started for example by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. After this workshop I am confident that we will see more positive examples in other countries in the region in the near future."

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The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) is the ecumenical agency on migration and integration, asylum and refugees, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. Members are Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant Churches and Councils of Churches as well as church-related agencies across Europe. CCME formally cooperates with the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches.