A Film festival about modern age slavery took place this time in the heart of Slovakia - Banská Bystrica

A Film festival named „Together against Trafficking“ was held this year for the third time in Slovakia. After two previous succesful festivals, the first in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, and then in Košice, it is the second largest city, we decided to bring the festival this year to Banská Bystrica as its region is one where the most frequent cases of human trafficking occur. It took place on Friday 21st of October 2016 on the occasion of the European day for fighting against Human Trafficking.

This film festival about thisa multi-billion crime industry is unique in Slovakia. Each year it is in a new place, each year it has different emphasis. This year we particularly focused on the stories of the victims – Slovaks, who had fallen into traffickers´ hands – but also on the value of each human life without exception. The films faithfully illustrated the effects of exploitation on the lives of the victims as well as on the difficulties in regaining their self-value and dignity.

In spite of the serious theme of the festival delivered via films, pictures and discussions, there was a light of hope, help and resistance against this strongly present phenomenon. We felt it in the new film „MADE IN: God’s Image“ by the Slovak director – Sr. Iva Kúšíková, SSpS – where the role of church is obvious in combatting Human Trafficking.

Another light of hope we could see was in the collection of photographs entitled „Life after Trafficking“. This depicted 12 survivors who expressed in their own words a strong desire for a new life. We also felt empowered by the discussion with workers who actively help the survivors to overcome their sad stories with their zeal to fight this problem and to share their experience and knowledge so that other potential victims can be protected.

Traditionally as part of the festival there was a discussion panel with experts from Slovakia and abroad. Our special guest this year was Mike Emberson, project director of Medaille Trust from the United Kingdom, who is well aware of the many people from Slovakia who come to find a good job and better life in his country but end up in traffickers´ hands. Our British guest spoke to the students during the morning session as well as to the wider public in the evening of his rich experiences in the field of victim help and support.

As usual the festival in the morning was aimed at students – those soon to be adults, from different secondary schools and they took an active part in quizzes and other interactive sessions we had prepared for them.

There were also accompanying activities that showed the wider picture of Human Trafficking, such as the already mentioned exhibition of photographs entitled „Life after Trafficking“, which depicts the memories and the real life of survivors after their return to Slovakia. By the entrance of the venue we placed the campaign „GIFT box Slovakia – people aren´t for sale“ –
a unique and enormous box wrapped as a gift lures people to look inside by using promises and sweet-sounding tags written on the outside. Once you enter the box you get the message. There are not any good jobs nor a sweet future instead stories of people who had fallen into trap before and got themselves into trouble. So we read their stories which describe the appalling reality of Human Trafficking.

The event offered participants an opportunity to support one of the shelters for victims of Human Trafficking by buying a hand-made bag that was manufactured in this workshop.

For those interested in organising their own film event we’ve had films packs made containing film DVDs and a brief manual on how to plan and organise such an event.

After the programme the participants were invited to stay for a drink and refreshments so that they could discuss their impressions and come to terms with this serious topic.

Their participation and interest itself is evidence of breaking through the indifference, to which Pope Francis calls us unceasingly and endeavoring to continue to fulfill the message of the festival: TOGETHER AGAINST TRAFFICKING.

The festival was organised by Caritas Slovakia in cooperation with our British partner ‘Unchosen’, with financial support from the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic.

This report is written by Jana Urbanova, who worked together with Sr. Bohdana Bezakova CJ when she still was a member of the team „Caritas Bratislava“ Slovakia Sisters of the CJ-community in Banska Bystrica took all part in this festival.