CJ and IBVM sisters involved in the work of RENATE

RENATE (Religious in Europe Networking against Trafficking and Exploitation) has welcomed 130 members from 27 countries to Rome for their second European Assembly (6 - 12 November 2016) where they are reflecting, learning, dialoguing and sharing best practices in their work to combat human trafficking and exploitation.

Among those attending the RENATE Assembly are two CJ and three Loreto sisters: s. Adina Balan CJ from Romania and s. Bohdana Bezkova CJ from Slovakia, s. Imelda Poole IBVM from Albania, s. Pilar Gonzalez Cano IBVM from Spain, s. Margo Mulvey IBVM from Ireland.

‘Ending Trafficking begins with us' - that's the message from the network of religious against trafficking.

The highlight of day one of the RENATE Assembly was the private audience with Pope Francis in the Vatican.

Imelda Poole IBVM, the President of RENATE thanked Pope Francis on behalf of the organisation, citing specific ways in which he has raised awareness of human trafficking, especially the suffering of those caught up in it. She went on to say that Francis has offered tremendous support for all those working to eliminate trafficking and who support and work with survivors. The Pope listened attentively and when Imelda finished speaking he jumped up and came down to greet her warmly.

In his response Francis began by offering ‘prayerful good wishes for the fruitfulness of these days of prayer, reflection and discussion.’ Reminding us that our Assembly was taking place during the Jubilee Year of Mercy, he spoke of the invitation to ‘enter more deeply into the mystery of God’s mercy and, like the Good Samaritan, to bring the balm of that mercy to so many open wounds in our world’. Pope Francis believes that among the most troubling of these open wounds is the trade in modern forms of slavery.

Acknowledging that much has been accomplished, Francis said that one of the challenges we face is indifference and even complicity plus a tendency by many to look the other way, because powerful networks of crime are involved. Francis thanked us for our ‘faithful witness to the Gospel of Mercy,’ demonstrated by our commitment to the recovery and rehabilitation of victims.

Revealing his understanding of the complexity of issues related to human trafficking Francis mentioned the ‘distinctive contribution made by women in accompanying other women and children on a deeply personal journey of healing and reintegration.’ He then shared his hope that our time together during this coming week, will help us be more effective witnesses to the Gospel, ‘in one of the great peripheries of contemporary society.’ Pope Francis concluded his address by commending each one of the group ‘to the loving intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy,’ after which he gave us his papal blessing.
International guest speakers include: Dr Myria Vassiliadou, EU Anti-Trafficking Co-ordinator, Sr Gabriella Bottani, Director of Talitha Kum, Ms Helena Maleno Garzón, Specialist in Migration Phenomenon, Sr Eugenia Bonetti, mc, recipient of numerous international awards for her work to combat Human Trafficking, Domestic servitude and Child labour, in addition to providing for victim aftercare and survivor empowerment, Iana Matei, President of 'Reaching out Romania' shelter assisting victims of human trafficking, Sr Valeria Gandini, cm, Immigration and Trafficking of Human Beings Sicily, Theo Hendrickx, Police Officer and Pastor working in the Netherlands with survivors and their families, Shirley, a survivor of Human Trafficking, from the Netherlands, Dr Anna Rowlands, Catholic Theological Chair, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University, United Kingdom, Spirituality and Theology focus on human trafficking. Sister Denise Boyle, fmdm, International facilitator and experienced in Global Justice programmes and Sister Ímelda Poole, IBVM, President of RENATE Network.

Also in attendance: Mgr Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, Chancellor, Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Vatican City, Mgr Giancarlo Perego, Head of the Centre for Studies and Archives, Caritas Italy and Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

During the Assembly, a documentary film: "Called to give voice to the Voiceless", launched, showing the work of RENATE Network in Europe.

This article was given to us from Sr. Bohdana Bezakova CJ, Slovak Province