

Rise in vulnerability to human trafficking and hunger during COVID-19 reported by global network of 650,000 Catholic Sisters

Rome, 24 September 2020: Vulnerability to human trafficking and hunger is rising at an alarming rate among poor and vulnerable people, according to Catholic Sisters working in those communities around the world.

Job losses and the isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are fuelling the issues and hiding them from many of the support systems designed to prevent them, the Sisters said.

Mexican women initially trafficked to the United States have been repatriated to continue being exploited in Mexico. In India, migrants have been abandoned after losing their jobs. In these and many other cases, Sisters have provided aid such as financial support for rent and school fees, food and sanitary material, as well as negotiating with local authorities and other providers to harness resources.

Representing more than 650,000 women, the International Union Superiors General (UISG) today launched the campaign #YouAreMySister to raise awareness of the issues. Mental health is also of increasing concern in communities around the world as the longer-lasting implications of the pandemic become clear.

Sister Patricia Murray, Executive Secretary, UISG, said: “The international response to COVID-19 has to be more agile and more sensitive to local communities, with resources redirected to where there is the most urgent need.

“Sisters are uniquely placed to help address the most pressing issues in poor communities brought about by the pandemic, because we are already at the centre of community development efforts. But too often we are not being listened to.”

[A 2,000-strong international network of Catholic Sisters is dedicated to combatting human trafficking.](#)

Around 25,000 survivors of human trafficking are now safer because of the work of the Catholic Sisters and almost 200,000 people have been helped with prevention and awareness-raising activities.

As COVID-19 has broadened from a public health crisis to become an economic one as well, Sisters around the world brought the issue of hunger to the attention of international donors – which in turn enabled them to provide direct relief to communities.

The highest levels of hunger are found in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, which is why UISG championed the work of the Sisters in communities such as Kenya and India in the #YouAreMySister campaign.

[A report by FAO, UNICEF, WHO and other UN agencies](#) estimates that as many as an additional 130 million people may go hungry in 2020 as a result of the economic recession triggered by COVID-19.

Sister Murray added: “The world needs to stop and pay attention to the reality of the situation and come together to act. It is vital that Sisters have a place at the table in the post-COVID development dialogue on key issues like human trafficking, hunger and mental health – otherwise more people will suffer.”

UISG is a membership organisation for the leaders of Catholic women’s congregations worldwide.

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Notes to editors:

Human trafficking describes the recruitment, harbouring and movement of a person for exploitation through modern slavery.

According to the 2018 Global Slavery Index, 40.3 million people are enslaved in the world today, with the highest numbers in the Asia Pacific region. 1 in 4 of all people in modern slavery are children.

According to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, almost 690 million people went hungry in 2019 – up by nearly 60 million over the past five years.

UISG has distributed almost USD \$1,000,000 to address local community needs during the pandemic.