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## The Nexus Between Human Trafficking and Forced Migration Is Dramatic but Not Hopeless

*Result of Web Briefing Involving Survivor Stories & Voices of Those on the Ground*

We know that there is a dangerous link between forced migration and human trafficking. We call for courage to do all we can for the safety, dignity and freedom of all God's children.

Together, we are searching for answers – across organizations and political parties, with briefing participants and policy makers.

We have the tools – the voices of those forced to migrate. The stories of those who have survived human trafficking. The experiences of those who offer comfort and support along the journey, at the border, through charities and government entities.

On June 14, 2023, the **U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking (USCSAHT)** and the **National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd (NAC)** held a virtual briefing exploring the nexus between human trafficking and forced migration attended by several hundred listeners.

**Katie Boller Gosewisch**, Executive Director of USCSAHT, has commented that “Human traffickers amplify the vulnerabilities faced by those who are forced, through conflict, disaster, and disparity, to flee their homes. We, as Americans, as faithful citizens, have a duty of care to ensure that those who seek refuge and safety at our border are not met with malice and avarice.”

**Fran Eskin-Royer**, Executive Director of NAC, wrote that "Additionally, with reconciliation as a Good Shepherd guiding tenet, we strive to build bridges across political divides and seek bi-partisan support whenever possible. We are grateful that ending human trafficking is a goal shared by policymakers on both sides of the aisle. Our hope is that this project's focus on migrant trafficking victims might lead to bi-partisan policy solutions that make this group safer."

**Sr. Ann Scholz, SSND**, moderated the discussion among three panelists. Sr. Ann offered that “women religious are long-time leaders in the efforts to put an end to the recruitment and exploitation of others by force, fraud or coercion. They have educated the public about the dangers of human trafficking and accompanied survivors on their journey to healing even as they’ve worked to address the root causes of human trafficking, including forced migration. Catholic sisters and their colleagues have seen firsthand how human traffickers prey on those forced to flee their homes by circumstances beyond their control.”

The first panelist to address the briefing was **Cristían Eduardo**, an advocate, speaker and educator who is a Mexican immigrant and survivor of international and domestic sex and labor trafficking. Cristían wanted attendees to know that the decision to flee, to migrate, is not easy and is not made lightly. He also noted that he is an example of false assumptions regarding people who are trafficked. He is male and he was 24 years old when he was trafficked.

Cristían explained that migrants are extremely vulnerable once in the United States because they 1) often know very little English; 2) fear the police; 3) don't know their rights; 4) do not have legal immigration status and fear deportation. "Traffickers," said Cristían, "use this fear as a tool of coercion to control them."

**Sr. Tracey Horan, SP**, who works at the Kino Border Initiative, spoke next. Sr. Tracey works directly with impacted people on both sides of the Arizona-Mexico border documenting abuses and advocating for change. Sr. Tracey shared the story of a woman who fled extortion and death threats in Guatemala and was held hostage once she and her young daughters arrived in Nogales, Mexico. "People face abuse because of a lack of clarity and are vulnerable," said Sr. Tracey. Families stuck in limbo in Mexico are vulnerable and routinely at risk of abuse, extortion, trafficking. They are stuck and the traffickers are waiting. Indeed, criminal groups in Mexico see 'business' boom when the United States blocks or sends back migrants.

The final panelist was **Sr. Mary Jean Doyle, DC**, who works at Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington where she accompanies people who have been trafficked, helping them build trust and rebuild their lives. Sr. Mary Jean talked about life in Africa for a woman she helped where not just employment and electricity were scarce, but so was water. This woman then found herself trafficked, through the ruse of a cousin, into domestic servitude in the home of a diplomat in the United States. She escaped. Yet, she had to wait years for a special visa for trafficked persons so that she could work and remain in the U.S. People in the U.S. who have escaped trafficking need to establish trust. They need resources and new skills.

How do we break the link between human trafficking and forced migration? How can government help?

Cristían said that the U.S. needs bipartisan immigration reform and that migrants need work permits so they can sustain themselves and their families.

He noted that organizations and interviewers often miss signs of human trafficking; and that they are only considering asylum qualifications, not thinking about T- or U-Visas that are designated for people who have been trafficked, among others. He also worried about trafficking within the foster care system and for those who run away from a foster home and then age-out on the streets.

Sr. Tracey echoed the extremely long wait periods suggesting a need to increase capacity and increase support to NGOs (non-governmental organizations) to help with the interviews and processing. She also called for long-term efforts to support democracy around the world.

She commented on the importance of follow-up home visits by trained social workers so that signs of trafficking are not missed.

Sr. Mary Jean said that we all have a responsibility to welcome migrants and to be aware of resources to help them. She said that the U.S. immigration system needs a complete overhaul and that localities, charities, civic organizations and good government can come together to find solutions.

*[USCSAHT](#) was founded in 2013 by a group of Catholic Sisters committed to ending human trafficking and supporting survivors. They created a national network of resources and support that includes many different congregations of women religious and mission-aligned partners. Today, this member-based organization has grown to include more than 115 congregations and another 100+ individuals and organizations spread throughout the United States. USCSAHT is also the U.S. member of Talitha Kum, the international network of consecrated life working to end human trafficking.*

*[The National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd](#) educates and advocates on social justice issues for the transformation of society to the benefit of all people reflecting the spirituality, history and mission of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. NAC advocates at the Federal level for people living in poverty, immigrants, survivors of human trafficking, survivors of domestic abuse, and other vulnerable populations. NAC reflects the spirituality, history and mission of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd (better known as the Sisters of the Good Shepherd). The sisters and their agencies work in solidarity with the disenfranchised – particularly families, women and children – who often are forgotten, left-behind or dismissed.*