

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING FORUM



On Sunday, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2012, UCWLA Sydney Branch, held a forum on '**Human Trafficking**' in St Andrew's Ukrainian Catholic Church Hall, Lidcombe. Over 80 people attended, including UCWLA members, Religious and visitors from around Sydney and Wollongong.

The presenters for this forum are all dedicated women who work tirelessly in their own field so that the most vulnerable are assisted and supported wherever possible. Their presentations were compassionate and informative and we came away with a deeper understanding of this modern day slavery. The speakers included:

**Associate Prof. Jennifer Burn** – Director, Anti-Slavery Australia, Associate Professor, UTS Faculty of Law

**Topic: Human Trafficking and Reflections on the Legal Process**

**Sr Margaret Ng rsj** – Co-ordinator of the Josephite Counter Trafficking Prog., B. Ed., Dip. Counselling, M.P.S.

**Topic: Effects on and Needs of Trafficked People**

**Sr Noelene Simmons sm** – NSW Project Officer for Aust. Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH)

**Topic: Human Trafficking in Ukraine**

After each Session, a time was set aside for questions which produced discussion and sharing of experiences and stories related by participants of the forum of what had been shared with them, or what they had heard, regarding organ and human trafficking. Study reveals that one in every 10 Ukrainian persons knows someone in their community who has been trafficked abroad.

During the course of the day there was also a colourful sale of Fair Trade products by 'ethica accessories', an initiative that provides employment and income for women living in marginalised areas.

At the conclusion of the forum, the UCWLA Sydney Branch donated \$500 to ACRATH towards the needs of trafficked people. Sr Noelene was very grateful for this donation and expressed her appreciation and gratitude to UCWLA and the Ukrainian community for their generosity and hospitality.

**Below is a brief account of what was presented on this day.**

Worldwide, many believe there are 27 million people currently victimised by human trafficking and are living in bondage. They labour in fields and factories under brutal employers who threaten them with violence if they try to escape. They work in homes for families that keep them virtually imprisoned. They are forced to work as prostitutes or to beg in the streets, fearful of the consequences if they fail to earn their daily quota. They are women, men, and children of all ages, and they are often held far from home with no money, no connections, passports taken from them, and no way to ask for help. This is modern slavery, a crime that spans the globe, providing ruthless employers with an endless supply of people to abuse for financial gain. Human trafficking is a crime with many victims: not only those who are trafficked, but also the families they leave behind; some of whom will never see their loved ones again.

Trafficking has a broad global impact as well. It weakens legitimate economies, fuels violence, threatens public health and safety, shatters families, and shreds the social fabric that is necessary for progress. It is an affront to our basic values and our fundamental belief that all people deserve to live and work in safety and dignity.

On Wednesday, 30th May 2012 the Federal Attorney General introduced into the Australian Parliament new legislation that criminalises forced marriage, forced labour and organ trafficking. In presenting the bill the Hon. Nicola Roxon MP commented: *“A common factor of contemporary slavery and trafficking—from forced labour and forced marriage to organ trafficking—is the misuse and abuse of power. And such an abuse has no place here in Australia. I want to send that message loud and clear to all Australians and to all young people: duress, violence and intimidation are not acceptable in contemporary Australian society—in any context. Slavery, trafficking and forced marriage are unacceptable and they will now be very serious crimes.”*

**Human trafficking is out of control in Ukraine.** More Ukrainian men, women and children have been trafficked abroad than in any other Eastern European country since the Soviet collapse. Ukraine is a source, transit and, to a lesser extent, destination country for men, women and children trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labour. Women are forced into the sex industry, or forced to work as housekeepers, in service industries, or in textile or light manufacturing. The majority of Ukrainian male labour trafficking victims are subjected to forced labour in Russia, but also in other countries, primarily as construction labourers, factory and agricultural workers, or sailors.

According to Ukraine’s State Statistics Committee, about 70 percent of those who are looking for jobs are women. Girls and women seeking better lives abroad, due to their hardships at home, inevitably become potential victims of traffickers. The roots of human rights violations across the sex industry are linked to poverty and a lack of economic options, devastating health risks without commensurate care, a lack of credit and savings for workers, inadequate housing and security, and conditions leading to a myriad of other violations such as child labour and slavery.

The most vulnerable in Ukrainian society today are children currently living on the streets or coming out of the orphanages. It is estimated that 50-60 percent end up in some sort of a trafficked situation. That can mean being sold to a labour group or prostitution in Ukraine, forced to beg, or being trafficked across International borders.

Ukrainian victims are trafficked to Russia, Poland, Turkey, Italy, Austria, Spain, Germany, Portugal, the Czech Republic, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Israel, Greece, Lebanon, Benin, Tunisia, Cyprus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Slovakia, Syria, Switzerland, the United States, Canada and Belarus.

Recent media reports indicate that traffickers are also cashing in on the rising demand for replacement kidneys and other organs because of the rise in diabetes and other diseases. With Ukraine’s medical infrastructure and legislation making vital transplant organs hard to come by, the illegal trade in human organs is thriving as desperate people turn to the black market.

Ukraine’s National Academy of Defense has conducted anti-trafficking classes for Ukrainian troops being deployed for international peacekeeping duties. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Interior worked with Interpol to prevent known child sex tourism offenders from entering Ukraine.

The Government of Ukraine does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. During the reporting period (27.6.2011), a higher proportion of trafficking offenders were sentenced to time in prison compared with last year and prosecutors continued appealing low sentences given to trafficking offenders. The government also increased the number of victims identified and referred to NGOs for assistance. However, the government did not take sufficient steps to investigate, prosecute, and convict government officials complicit in human trafficking crimes and did not develop and implement a national victim referral mechanism.