

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 0773

Giovedì 27.10.2016

Conferenza Stampa del “Santa Marta Group”

Alle ore 13.30 di oggi, presso la Sala Stampa della Santa Sede, in Via della Conciliazione 54, si tiene una conferenza stampa del Card. Vincent Nichols, Arcivescovo di Westminster, Presidente della Conferenza episcopale di Inghilterra e Galles e Presidente del “Gruppo Santa Marta”, l’organismo internazionale contro il traffico di esseri umani lanciato nel 2014 da Papa Francesco.

Intervengono:

- Cardinale Vincent Nichols, Arcivescovo di Westminster - Presidente del “Santa Marta Group”;
- Al Bangura, sopravvissuto alla tratta;
- Princess, sopravvissuta alla tratta.

Al termine della conferenza saranno disponibili per le interviste:

- Commissario Generale Nestor Roncaglia – Polizia Federale Argentina;
- Suor Marines Biasibetti – Mozambico;
- Suor Rosita Milesi – Brasile;
- Direttore Generale Ignacio Cosidó Gutiérrez – Polizia Nazionale Spagnola;
- Commissario Kevin Hyland – Commissario Indipendente del Regno Unito anti-schiavitù.

Testi:

Tre vittime salvate dalla tratta: Al Bangura, Princess e Crystal. Di seguito le loro testimonianze in cui raccontano la loro storia:

1. Testimonianza di Al Bangura

Al Bangura was born and raised in Sierra Leone but now lives in London with his wife and young children. He is a professional footballer who has played for Watford Football Club in the UK's Premier League. Al is also a survivor on human trafficking. This is his story...

I was like any ordinary young boy growing up. I loved to run around, laugh and play with my friends. My bare feet were a permanent shade of orange, coloured by the hours spent kicking a ball around on the dusty ground near my home.

I grew up with my two younger sisters, my mother and my father, who at the time was head of a secret society. I was just a one-year old when he died but by the time I turned 15 I was put under lots of pressure to take on my father's position. During this time, Sierra Leone had experienced a brutal civil war and fearing for my life and family, I was sent to Guinea.

I was desperate to protect and provide for my mother and sisters but I was in a strange country and didn't know who to turn to. It was here that I met a Frenchman who promised the world – the opportunity many young men and I in particular had dreamt of – the chance to play professional football. I began to trust this man but it was here my nightmare truly began.

I was taken to Paris on the promise that I would play for a European football team. From there though I was taken to London. It quickly became clear that something wasn't right. I was taken to a hotel and left there, alone. Very soon, older men began to turn up and tried to get close to, then touch and then rape me. Scared and afraid I didn't know what was happening, couldn't speak English and had no one to turn to for help. I felt trapped. However, against all odds, and I still don't know how, I managed to escape.

I found someone who spoke my language and he paid for my bus ticket to the UK's Home Office. They couldn't verify my age, as I didn't have any identification. I was put into a home in Chertsey in the South East of England and it was there that I started to play football. Amazingly a scout for Watford Football Club spotted me and I was signed to play for the team. I was able to help get them promoted to the Premier League and ended up playing in front of thousands of people at some of the most famous stadiums in the world.

I realised how lucky I was to have got away. Sadly so many others in my position don't. In countries all over the world, trafficking not only exists but is thriving. In West Africa, my story is not uncommon. Thousands of young boys, many aspiring to be footballers, are sold a dream, which ends in a nightmare. In fact I still hear stories like mine from back home.

The truth is, slavery doesn't just happen in far away countries. It happens in our cities, towns, and neighbourhoods. It is happening now and it has to stop. Its perpetrators need to be brought to justice...for me, for other victims, for you. Traffickers need to go to prison so they can't continue their criminal activity.

Football is my passion and it has given me everything I have. Most importantly it gave me freedom. What happened still affects my everyday life. I find it hard, for example, to trust football agents who claim to represent my best interests and I've struggled to make the most of my talents. It has sometimes impacted my ability to provide for my family in these latter days of my career. However, when I play football I still feel free. I find my confidence. I start to smile.

I am now proud to now be an ambassador for Sport for Freedom, a charity that uses the positive power of sport

to raise awareness about human trafficking and help rehabilitate its survivors.

Just a week ago I spoke at Football for Freedom, an International U16's Tournament hosted by our charity in partnership with the Premier League. It brings together young academy players from the UK as well as international teams. I shared the stage with Kevin Hyland, the UK's fantastic Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner who has already achieved a great deal in his first year, and I was able to educate and tell my story to the young boys who are at the start of their footballing careers.

I was also truly honoured to speak at a service to commemorate the work of William Wilberforce and the UK's current fight against modern slavery. The British Prime Minister, Theresa May, who has been an inspirational champion for this important cause, was also in attendance and spoke passionately about the need to combat trafficking and modern slavery. She spoke to me privately and thanked me for the work I am doing.

Being here today though and having the opportunity to share my story with all of you and meeting His Holiness is one of the most special moments of my life.

I will continue to represent Sport for Freedom and use the power of sport to educate others about this awful crime. It is amazing to see how even an hour of sport or physical activity can bring some relief to survivors who have experienced real terror. It can help build trust, hope and confidence again. Sport can rebuild lives and it can bring communities together. That's how I've chosen to help and I hope you can all find it in your hearts to do whatever you can. I'm confident that by working together we can help end human trafficking and modern day slavery.

2. Testimonianza di Princess

My name is Princess Inyang, I was a victim of trafficking.

The traffickers brought me from Nigeria through London and France in 1999. They promise to give me a good job in Europe as a cook because I was a cook in my country.

But when I arrived in Italy the traffickers carried me to one Madam and she forced me to prostitution and also forced me to pay a debt of € 45,000,00. However I paid more than this, because the house rent was more than the main debt.

Life on the street was so difficult until I found my savior Mossino Alberto who gave me a hand, Mr Piero Vercelli that after became my manager and Don Gallo the priest of Caritas in Asti.

I escaped from the traffickers and then I founded PIAM Onlus with the idea of helping victims of prostitution, because I had felt as they feel. I am a living testimony of the dangers and atrocities to which many Nigerian women are subjected. My heart bleed for joy whenever I can help one.

PIAM was founded between 1999 and 2000 with the help of the people mentioned before. We started with outreach street team to recognize the victims on the road and let them come to our office to give them basic information on health and the contacts of other offices in their profits.

Moreover, PIAM assist victims, asking for a residence permit in accordance with Italian law, and we guarantee to the victim a shelter, education and vocational training.

This serves to educate and train and helps them to integrate into the Italian culture and social life, by giving them job opportunities,

Between 2004 2009, we worked in Nigeria against trafficking in collaboration with some local NGOs and we also

set up a clinic for the control and treatment for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

This was a way of creating opportunities to reach the girls in Edo State and discourage them to join the traffickers and this network has worked to reduce the number of victims in Italy in those years.

But we can see that traffickers continue their work more than ever, although NGOs did their best to assist the victims, but there are three things worthy of note with which we could help to reduce the number of victims.

1) more international projects in the country of origin, not only a collaboration with leading NGOs in Edo State, but focused in local areas to create skills and scholarships for young girls, because this might convince them not to come in Europe with traffickers.

2) the international law enforcement agencies should work strongly together to track down traffickers operating in Nigeria, Niger and Libya to reduce the sex trade and criminal events.

3) in conclusion, more shelters should be granted in Europe for victims of trafficking and more funds for protection programs for the numerous victims that are seeking for help.

3. Testimonianza di Crystal (non è presente nel corso della Conferenza Stampa ma vuole rendere pubblica la sua storia come l'ha raccontata al Papa)

Past situation:

My name is Crystal and I was trafficked from the Caribbean to work in domestic servitude. I was trying to escape from a violent marriage but ended up working 18 hours a day/ seven days a week for a middle-class Nigerian family. I knew no one in this country; therefore I relied totally on my traffickers. I was not allowed to speak to the neighbours/anyone. When I was trafficked to London the ages of my four children were (13, 10, 7 and 4).

Even today what baffles me the most is that my traffickers held very high positions in the church where they fellowshiped. I had a friend (or so I thought) whom I had confided in whilst I was back home in the Caribbean. This lady had travelled to the UK before, unbeknown to me, this lady also worked as a recruiter for the traffickers. After I had confided in her that I wanted to leave to my abusive husband, she then explained to me that unless I left the Caribbean it will be useless, especially since our island was a very tiny place. Because I had tried running away from my abusive husband in the past and it only resulted in him finding me, beating me and taking me back home like a piece of property, I trusted this lady.

Prior to travelling to the UK, I had never travelled outside of my country, far less heard about anything about human trafficking. Therefore I had no reason to doubt her. When she stated that she would assist me to make all of the necessary arrangement, I didn't expect her to put me in the situation from which I ended up in.

The Lady told me about a Christian family she'd been in contact with in the UK, she then introduced me to the wife over the phone. The wife would then call me on a regular basis and eventually I started opening up to her more and more. She then explained to me that she herself experienced domestic violence from a previous relationship, she knew what I was going through. Once again, I was told that the only way to escape this vicious cycle was to leave my country and travel to the UK. I was assured that they (the Christian family) will also help get my kids over, once I had settled in. I looked at this as a lifeline. Oh my God, is this really happening to me? Is this the end of life of pain? I felt as though a saviour had come to my rescue. I called her my guardian angel. I was very naïve. The thing with traffickers is they are predators; they definitely sort out their preys.

Current situation:

After a long seven year ordeal to have my case settled with Home Office, I am happy to state that my two youngest children, who are now 19 and 16 respectively, migrated to the UK last year and they have settled in exceedingly well. My first born is currently here on a six week vocation. (I haven't seen her in over a decade!!) and life is going great.

Also, I have been able to successfully gain and sustain full-time employment as an administrator/employment advisor for a welfare/back to work charity in South East London.

Although my dream job would be to work with victims/saviours of Human Trafficking some time in the future.

(1) Because the traffickers are well organised, they normally moved us around quite a bit. The traffickers moved me around a few times. Initially I was moved to St. Albans, then to Reading and lastly to Dartford.

(2) I spent a period of 4 years living as a domestic servitude for three different families

(3) I was arrested at the last family home, in Dartford. The lone female immigration officer asked me how did I come to be living at that address and after I told her my story she then advised me to once I got to the station, after being booked in I should ask to speak to a First Response Human Trafficking Officer. I was very grateful for this advice because it was only after that initial meeting then I actually started to understand the why the immigration officer advised me on that.

(4) Firstly, after securing my bail, the police then handed me in the care of Migrant Helpline. A few other organisations then came to my aid, such as: Medaille Trust, Refugee and Migrant Justice, The Poppy Project, The Helen Bamber Foundation, Women and Girls Network, The Human Trafficking Foundation, HERA (Women Entrepreneurs Against Trafficking), Refugee Council (to name a few).

(5) Some of the main challenges after I had escaped my traffickers, were as follows:

-Being believed by Home Office. Even though they acknowledged that I was a credible witness. It still took them 5 years for my Refugee Status to final be successful

-Due to lack of proper training when dealing with victims of human trafficking, some of my experience with the police was quite horrendous to say the least

-Lack of effective communication amongst main stakeholders (such as Home Office, NGO's, the Police and victims) caused a massive delay

-The NRM conclusive decision for my case was a total waste of by the time it was actually delivered. It took them over 3 years; they finally came back with a negative decision. Even though that decision should have been made within 45 days of a reasonable grounds decision

-Due to the lengthy delay in my human trafficking case, the CPS advised that my traffickers would not be prosecuted. However they were both arrested

-Throughout the duration of 5 years whilst I was awaiting a decision from Home Office, I was moved around over 11 times (which included supported accommodation and NASS accommodation)

From this experience I have learnt that the Lord is more than able to take us through any circumstances or situation. My spiritual walk with Christ has definitely grown a lot stronger because I was able to rely on my inner strength; something I didn't even knew I had.

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