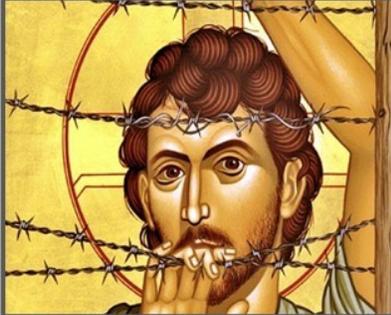


LOOKING BEYOND OUR BORDERS



Focus Issues:

**Environmental Justice
and
Human Trafficking**

(Icon by Robert Lentz OFM
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a celebration of

International Human Rights Day

Saturday, 13 December 2014

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

San Damiano Hall, Church of St. Francis of Assisi

127 W 31st Street, New York, NY 10001

FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

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Looking beyond our Borders Environmental Justice and Human Trafficking

Keynote:

Good Morning,

It is a pleasure and honor to be invited today to share with you on 'Environmental Justice and Human Trafficking.' On Wednesday last we celebrated International Human Rights Day. The theme of the day was Human Rights 365. Human Rights every day was the message of the Secretary General of the United Nations. Mr. Ban Ki-Moon ended his message with the words 'Let us respond to the cries of the exploited, and uphold the right to human dignity



Congregation of
Our Lady of Charity of
The Good Shepherd

Good Shepherd International Justice Peace Office – Winifred Doherty - December 13, 2014

for all.’ A few words catch me ...Let us respond to the crises of the exploited... yes girls and women, and boys and men are exploited in Human Trafficking - labour trafficking, bonded labor, involuntary domestic servitude and debt bondage, trafficking for sexual exploitation, organ removal, child soldiers, forced marriage - all human rights violations but today we are aware that the cosmos/ the environment is also being exploited and is crying out for justice

The theme for today – Environmental Justice and Human Trafficking has already had an airing here at St Francis of Assisi on March 11th of this year. A question asked was - In what ways do abuses against humans and abuses against the environment overlap or relate? I suggest that this same question guide the discussions today.

Looking beyond our borders ...we live in a globalized world Globalization is a process of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations, a process driven by international trade and investment and aided by information technology. The process of globalization has effects on human physical well being and the environment. While there are many positive effects of globalization these same processes facilitate environmental degradation and the violation of human rights in human trafficking

What are the roots causes of environment injustice or environmental degradation and people’s vulnerable to being trafficking? Is there a relationship? Unsustainable use of natural resources can and does ‘rape’ the earth and cause poverty. Corporate entities – e.g. Mining, logging and fishing companies exploit the land, forest and the seas. Often this is done ‘using’



trafficked labour while people living locally are robbed of access to a livelihood, disempowered and vulnerable to poverty and to be trafficked.

‘Eco Justice’ (Canada) ¹ a national charitable organization dedicated to defending citizens rights to a healthy environment say that environmental rights are human rights. St Francis had the right idea with Brother Sun and Sister Moon. They note that there is conflict between keeping the air breathable, water drinkable and communities healthy and environmental laws and regulatory processes that fail to protect people and places. People in indigenous, rural and low income communities are most affected.

The struggle for Environmental Justice at the UN and the recognition of the right to a healthy environment began with the Stockholm Conference in 1972 and was further endorsed in June 1992 with the UN Conference on Environment and Development. Twenty years later – in 2012 we had Rio+20 Conference in Brazil. At the United Nations for the past 18 months the processes leading up to an agreement on Sustainable Development Goals focusing on three pillars – the social, the environment and the economic is underway – now without it’s difficulties I may add.

Environmental Justice - 27 independent experts of the Human Rights Council, called on the State Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to recognize the adverse effects of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights, ²and to adopt urgent and ambitious mitigation and adaptation measures to prevent further harm. They call for

¹ <http://www.ecojustice.ca>

² http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/SP/SP_To_UNFCCC.pdf



language that respects, protects, promotes and fulfills human rights for all. COP 20 has Just concluded in Lima, Peru.

Bringing together Environmental Justice and Human Trafficking has been a journey in my own life and is being challenged by your invitation to address this issue in the keynote. I am a Good Shepherd Sister and we have strong networks with regard to human trafficking and violence against women and girls. We provide services of prevention and protection. I am not well versed in the environmental issues but my awareness was heightened when I met Ambassador Pablo Salon, Bolivia's Ambassador to the UN in 2009 who was advocating for a United Nations Resolution on Mother Earth.³ Further discussion aimed at giving 'Mother Earth' the same rights as humans. The Resolution recognizes the Earth as a living entity that humans have sought to 'dominate and exploit' – to the point that the "well being and existence of many beings" is now threatened. My initial reaction was well if 'rape' of women and girls ceased so also would rape of the earth! More recently the challenge to move from 'siloes' thinking – from the tendency to hone in on one problem at a time - to having a more integrated approach is key for sustainability - not just of humans but of the very cosmos itself. I quote from Ambassador Salon "If you want to have balance, and you think that the only (entities) who have rights are humans or companies, then how can you reach balance? But if you recognize that nature too has rights, and (if you provide) legal forms to protect and preserve those rights, then you can achieve balance."

³ http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/mother_earth_day_RES_en.pdf



In preparing for today I discovered that Kevin Bales,⁴ Co-founder and previous president of 'Free the Slaves' was/is planning to write a book on this very topic ' Environmental Destruction and Slavery' and the deadly connection between the two. In the history of slavery there are strong links between slavery and economics and slavery was connected with the social, cultural, political and religious context of the time but Bales argues that today, contemporary modern day slavery has no context and the focus is on the person referred to as a victim. His argument is that by focusing just on the person we cannot end human trafficking. His experience 'freeing the slaves' hindered him from seeing the environmental degradation – all around 'the slaves.' Good Shepherd experience working in Kuazawi in the Democratic Republic of Congo bears this out.

The US State Department in June of this year prepared a fact sheet on 'the intersection between Environmental Degradation and Human Trafficking'⁵ Certain industries face particularly high environmental risks, including agriculture, fishing and aquaculture, logging, and mining. Workers in these sectors also face risks; the use of **forced labor** has been documented along the supply chains of many commercial sectors. Exploitation of both people and natural resources appears even more likely when the yield is obtained or produced in illegal, unregulated, or environmentally harmful ways and in areas where monitoring and legal enforcement are weak. This focus on the rule of law and lack of it is also part of Bales' thinking.

⁴ <http://vimeo.com/56705165>

⁵ <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/fs/2014/227667.htm>



The issue is not either or, but both and, AND MORE. Human trafficking, the buying and selling of people is just another business albeit a criminal business. The market forces of supply and demand – giving the customer what the customer wants, drive human trafficking on all levels.

Human trafficking, exploitative of the human person, their labor, sexuality and body parts is a criminal activity generating billions in profits while violating human rights and dignity and perpetrating violence. The experience of people living in poverty makes them vulnerable to human traffickers. Exploitation of people, their labour, sexuality and body parts is facilitated by greed, patriarchy and gender inequality **which are embedded in the ‘psyche’ of exploiters and facilitated by systems and structures at local, national and international level.** The persistence of inequality, unequal distribution of wealth, resources and power is the principal reason for the persistence of poverty and violation of human rights - the person’s and the earth’s. These same inequalities are the root causes making people vulnerable to human trafficking.

The current situation of inequalities, including gender inequality, violence against women and girls, discrimination, unsustainable models of development and environmental degradation must be challenged and addressed. Globalization has facilitated the concentration of power in the hands of transnational companies and vested elite interests. Transformation demands a shift towards just and sustainable societies and livelihoods, the upholding of human rights, people and earth, dignity, gender equality an environmental justice and away from the concentration of money and power in the hands of a few.



The challenge is to engage in SYSTEMIC rather than issues-based thinking. It is not a matter of environmental justice or human trafficking. It is both and. Mindsets and systems are interlinked. Change happens in the doing. Within the issue of human trafficking and environmental degradation the mindset is one of patriarchy, hierarchy and power over, control and obvious violation of human rights. Can we promote person-centered, community-centered and Mother Earth centered approaches working towards fairness, developing relational equality between men and women and a relational understanding of the economy situated within society and nature; one humanity, one economy in one planet, with social justice at its heart.

