

Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation News

Congregation of the Sisters of Bon Secours



Human Trafficking

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

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“Human trafficking is an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ.” Pope Francis

Addressing human trafficking is one of the core justice priorities of Bon Secours. As we commemorate the **World Day Against Human Trafficking** this month and with our Bon Secours presence now in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), this issue of JPIC News will focus on the particular faces and facets of human trafficking present there: trafficking related to conflict minerals, child soldiers and forced marriage.

As you read and reflect on this Newsletter allow the faces of these trafficking victims to speak to your heart. While the content may be uncomfortable to read and absorb, allow it to bring you into solidarity with the Congolese people. How might we be called to listen to “the cry of the poor” in the DRC as we begin our ministry there? How might we need the Congolese people to challenge us to action in addressing human trafficking as we bring the Bon Secours charism of compassion, healing and liberation to our newest mission?

Slavery in Conflict Minerals

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is rich in resources that make modern life possible – minerals used by industrialized nations in manufacturing, jewelry, and many other industries. Gold and the “Three Ts” (tin, tungsten, tantalum) are used in everything from cars to medical devices, household goods to high-tech electronics.

Mineral resources have the potential to help the DRC’s economy expand and diversify. But instead, much of the profit benefits groups engaged in armed conflict. Ore mined by slaves is smuggled into global supply chains for metals, tainting products we use every day.



Slave labor fuels the fighting and prevents residents from building better lives.

- Militias round up villagers at gunpoint and force them to work.
- False criminal charges are levied against people who are then sentenced in corrupt or phony trials to toil at mines.
- People are enslaved to pay off household or business debts. Money, food, or tools are advanced to laborers, but phony accounting and abusive interest rates prevent them from repaying the debt. Miners are forced to keep digging.
- Sex slavery is rampant. Militias abduct women and girls from villages. Others are lured to mining zones by false promises of financial support.

Every day,
in every country in the world,
human traffickers exploit people
for profit.

The poor and the vulnerable
are most at risk.

July
JPIC Days of Remembrance

July 14
St. Kateri Tekakwitha
Patroness of
Ecology and the Environment



July 28
World Hepatitis Day

July 30
World Day Against
Human Trafficking





"I had to choose between dying and working for them. They left me two hours to think about it (with water and food). I said to myself that if I refused I was going to die because there was no one to help me or warn my family."
DK, former child soldier

Child Soldiers

The majority of the child soldiers being used in the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are boys who were enlisted by force. But almost a third are girls, and a new report shows that many of them have joined armed groups voluntarily, driven by poverty and a lack of access to education.

Many of the children fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's militia groups were abducted and forced to enlist. But researchers have found that girls are joining the groups voluntarily, motivated by a lack of access to education and a future with no prospects.

Source: Witness.org

Forced Marriage in the Congo typically fall into one of four categories: marriage by rape, marriage by sale, marriage by kidnapping, and child marriage.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is ranked 19th globally for the percentage of girls who are married before they reach their 18th birthday (37%). A 2017 UNICEF study with this data also showed the DRC ranking ninth highest for the absolute number of child brides, at 1.3 million.

Source: The Borgen Project

Jeanette's Story: Marriage by Rape

Jeanette, from Mukere, tells the story of a man who came to see her at school one day when she was 14 years old. At the time, she was living with her aunt following the death of her mother and two brothers. The man who visited her asked her to pay him a visit at his home. Jeanette decided to go, not understanding why he had asked. When she arrived, friends of the man locked her in a room with him, and although she tried to fight him off, she was raped. She became pregnant, and her aunt evicted her. Jeanette's aunt had already promised her to another man in exchange for regular deliveries of fish to the family's home. Having been raped, she was no longer a viable candidate for marriage to the fisherman.



Democratic Republic of Congo TVPA Tier 2 Watch List: The standards set by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) classified the DRC in the Tier 2 Watch List in 2020. This means that while the country is taking action to meet the TVPA's standards, it still has high numbers of human trafficking victims. There are 3,107 documented cases of children who escaped from the armed groups in the previous year. The government has also failed to provide evidence of increasing efforts to counter severe forms of trafficking. The 2021 TVPA report will be issued this month and will again rank the DRC according to the actions taken to address human trafficking in 2020.



Combating Human Trafficking in the DRC

The Free the Slaves Project is an international organization and lobby group that campaigns against modern slavery. Its initiatives in the DRC include supporting local groups to promote and improve access to education and increased transparency by companies that import minerals from the DRC. Transparency is increasingly important as mining companies are guilty of using forced labor and consumers have the power to pressure companies to use ethically sourced materials through their choices. Additionally, the Free the Slaves Project teaches communities to mobilize to eliminate slavery and educates government officials about anti-trafficking laws and their duty to enforce them. Thus far, the project has increased resistance to slavery in 15 mining communities and trained dozens of security officials and civilian prosecutors on trafficking laws.

Another project that is helping reduce human trafficking in the DRC is **The Children, Not Soldiers** campaign. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the UN started The Children, Not Soldiers campaign to encourage international action against child recruitment and use in conflict. As part of the campaign, countries that have committed grave violations against children have to sign an Action Plan committing to the enforcement of criminal laws that prohibit and punish the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. After the UN identified thousands of grave violations in the DRC in 2012, which included the abduction and recruitment of children, the country signed an Action Plan. In 2017, the campaign delisted the DRC from the Action Plan because of a commitment to end and prevent the recruitment of children. For example, the DRC put several commanders of armed groups on trial for child recruitment and signed 21 commitments with armed groups to end the use of child soldiers, which led to the release of 920 children.

Source: Free The Slaves

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