Trafficking



Mary Mugo from Nairobi, Kenya, wears a T-shirt that reads "Pray Against Human Trafficking" as she joins other young people in Rome's central Santa Maria in Trastevere Square Feb. 6, 2024, to raise awareness about human trafficking. Mugo is "youth ambassador" in Kenya for Talitha Kum, an international network organized by religious fighting human trafficking. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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Strategic collaboration, especially with law enforcement monitoring crimes online, is needed in the fight against human trafficking, according to the head of an international network of religious orders and partners against trafficking.

"New challenges in preventing and combating human trafficking affecting children have emerged," particularly as traffickers are using the Internet "to advertise and sell children online for sexual exploitation and to distribute child sexual abuse material," said Maryknoll Sister Abby Avelino, international coordinator for the international network, Talitha Kum.

There is also another worrying trend, according to the Global Slavery Index 2023 report, of "orphanage trafficking," in which children are recruited to live in private, donor-funded residential care facilities that have little to no government oversight and where they are exploited for profit, she said in an article published in the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, July 29.

July 30 marks the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, sponsored by the United Nations.

This year's day was dedicated to children. One in three victims of human trafficking globally is a child and a disproportionate number of them are girls, according to the U.N.'s Global Report on Trafficking in Persons. Children are also twice as likely to face violence during trafficking than adults.

"Amid overlapping crises such as armed conflicts, pandemics, economic hardships and environmental challenges, children are increasingly vulnerable to trafficking," the report said.

"Furthermore, the proliferation of online platforms poses additional risks as children often connect to these sites without adequate safeguards. Traffickers exploit online platforms, social media and the dark web to recruit and exploit children, utilizing technology to evade detection, reach wider audiences, and disseminate exploitative

content," it said.

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Avelino wrote, "Every year on July 30, Talitha Kum joins the annual U.N. campaign" to add its appeal to help protect children and prevent them from falling into human trafficking.

"Children are subjected to various forms of trafficking, including exploitation in forced labor, forced marriage, criminality or begging, trafficked for illegal adoption, and online and sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children," she wrote.

Given the ongoing and new challenges affecting children, she wrote, "we need a strategic collaboration, particularly with law enforcement agencies with skills in combating technology-facilitated human trafficking by monitoring online platforms."

"It is the call for urgent action to protect vulnerable groups, especially children, from exploitation and support child victims of trafficking," she wrote, encouraging people to learn more about the work of Talitha Kum, including through its new app, "Walking in Dignity."

Founded 15 years ago, the Rome-based Talitha Kum network supports training programs in preventing trafficking and building awareness among vulnerable groups, particularly among women, girls, migrants and refugees. More than 623,000 people were involved in their prevention campaigns in 2023, she wrote.

"Many victims and survivors remind us of the need to create norms and rules that support the flourishing of men and women as people and members of their community, but above all to promote a culture of dignity and an economy of care," Avelino wrote.