News
Q&As



Sr. Laurentina Suharsih is a member of the Sisters of Divine Providence and serves as the coordinator of Justice Peace Integrity of Creation for her congregation in Indonesia. (Courtesy of Sr. Laurentina Suharsih)



by Fr. Kristian Paskalis Cangkung

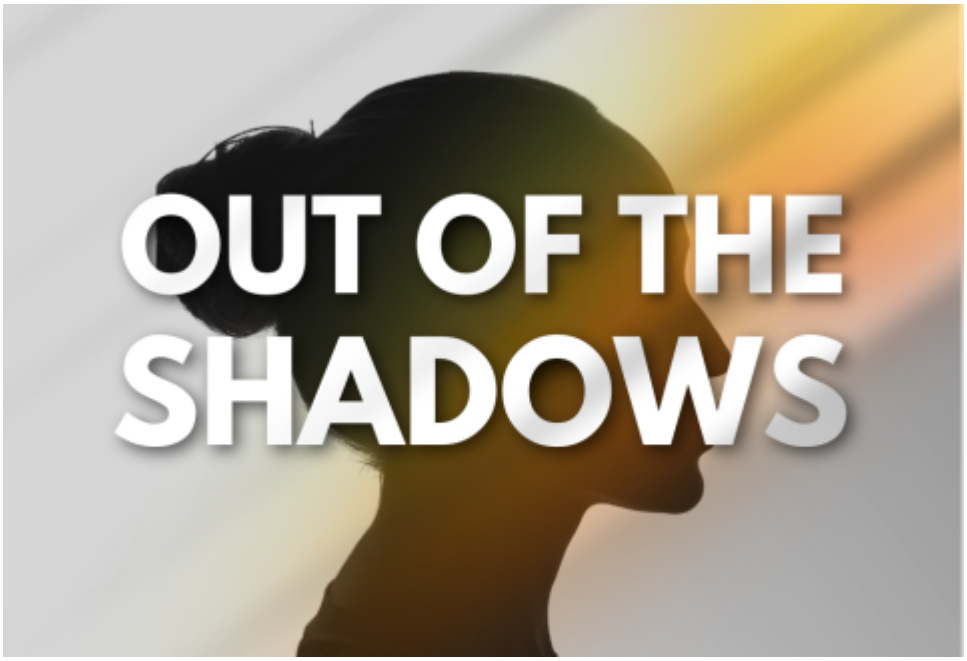
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Editor's note: *This story is part of Global Sisters Report's yearlong series, "Out of the Shadows: Confronting Violence Against Women," which will focus on the ways Catholic sisters are responding to this global phenomenon.*



(GSR logo/Olivia Bardo)

Sr. Laurentina Suharsih, 52, is a member of the Sisters of Divine Providence and a coordinator of Justice Peace Integrity of Creation, or JPIC, in Indonesia. She is one of three recipients of a Lifetime Achievement Award for her anti-human trafficking ministry from the Indonesian government.

Prabowo Subianto, Indonesia's president, gave the prestigious award to Suharsih on Dec. 28, 2024, in Jakarta. and marks the government's recognition of Suharsih and other anti-human trafficking activists in recent years in Indonesia.

Suharsih spoke to Global Sisters Report about her anti-human trafficking ministry.

GSR: How long have you been involved with anti-human trafficking?

Suharsih: I've been working in this ministry for more than a decade. I was invited to engage in this ministry when I was assigned to West Timor, East Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia, in 2011. What encouraged me most was my encounter with a victim of human trafficking from Timor. She was a legal worker in Malaysia but was treated badly and physically abused by the family she worked with. From then on, with the knowledge of my congregation, I committed myself to this ministry.

I studied social and political issues in Jakarta in 2014, taking some opportunities to enrich my knowledge and experience with the Migrant Care community and *Sahabat Insan* (headed by Jesuit Fr. Ignatius Ismartono). After my studies in 2016, I returned to Timor, and my provincial superior entrusted me [with] the responsibility as coordinator of JPIC and the anti-human trafficking ministry.

In 2017, the archbishop of Kupang invited me to join the archdiocese's JPIC. I collaborated with the JPIC team, educating young girls and boys about anti-human trafficking. However, I was not satisfied because it was only a kind of [motivation] or campaign against human trafficking, and I wanted concrete actions.

What have you accomplished in this ministry?

I do not work alone. I cooperate with the JPIC, religious congregations, and even Protestant pastors and other volunteers in the ecumenical spirit. I was introduced by my friend to two female Protestant pastors, the Rev. Emmy Sahertian and the Rev. Paoina Bara Pa, at the *Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor*, or GMIT (Evangelical Christian Church of Timor) and other activists in the anti-human trafficking ministry. I feel grateful to [know] them as they encouraged me to go deeper into this ministry. I enjoy opportune moments to pray and dialogue with them on how to advocate for the victims and deal with the government on human trafficking issues.

Currently, I work with the Commission for Justice and Peace – the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, and together with other clerics and lay members of the commission, we educate students and workers about migrant workers and the issue of human trafficking. We also advocate for the victims.

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Can you explain why you've been called the "cargo nun"?

Honestly, I am not so pleased with that title. The "cargo nun" was [coined] by the local media, [who] frequently find me at the port or the airport of Kupang, waiting [for] the coffins of migrant workers who died abroad, loaded as cargo. That is part of this ministry. I know it is hard to accept this.

Last year, more than 100 migrant workers from East Nusa Tenggara province died in Malaysia due to serious illness or accident. Most of them were illegal workers. And it was so distressing to see the families who found their loved ones return home like this. At [a] moment like that, I accompany the families and help them bring the coffins home to diverse places or islands. A donated vehicle, [used] as [an] ambulance, is available to help the families.

What are your expectations from the government and the church in fighting human trafficking?

We know that human trafficking is a very urgent issue. It is also a complicated matter. Human trafficking should be one of our main concerns in society and the church today. Sadly, there is a lack of attention and responsibility from the government, politicians and the church. Everybody should open their eyes [to the] victims of human trafficking. We cannot tolerate this [to happen] again and again.

The government should play an important role in avoiding human trafficking. At the same time, I hope the Catholic Church, together with other religions, becomes the frontrunner in raising voices and action against human trafficking.



Sr. Laurentina Suharsih is pictured with other religious during her silver anniversary of religious life on Jan. 1, 2025. Suharsih is a member of the Sisters of Divine Providence and a coordinator of Justice Peace Integrity of Creation for her congregation in Indonesia. (Kristian Paskalis Cangkung)

What challenges do you experience in this ministry?

I get tired. I get tired when I realize that human trafficking seems to be a never-ending issue. Sometimes, a lack of support and appreciation from church authorities or other religious men and women weakens my energy to keep fighting. But I don't want to give up. As [a] religious, I believe this is one of our urgent missions today. I [use] prayer and meditation constantly [to] energize my spiritual power. I might have abandoned this ministry without a deep and strong relationship with God.

How do you relate this ministry to your religious vocation?

I've been a Divine Providence sister for 25 years. I celebrated the silver anniversary of my religious profession on Jan. 1, 2025. And I am grateful for being part of this anti-human trafficking ministry. It does make sense [in] my religious life. Most importantly, I am not alone in this battle against human trafficking. I have been journeying together with other collaborators.

My motto for my silver anniversary was "*Tuhan ada di sini. Cukup bagiku*" ("God is here. That's enough for me").

God is with me in this ministry. I experience God's presence wherever I go, accompanying the victims and their families. Or when I and other collaborators wait for hours [for] the arrival of the coffins loaded [as] cargo at the airport. I also see his presence among those activists who tirelessly fight against human trafficking. It is truly my faith [that keeps me] going in this challenging ministry.

This story appears in the **Out of the Shadows: Confronting Violence Against Women** feature series. View the full series.