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NIGERIAN SURVIVOR OF TRAFFICKING BRINGS ON TEARS IN TURIN

June 14, 2007, Turin, Italy: Angel, 21, was expecting to work in a factory when she was persuaded to leave her home in Nigeria and set out for Italy. Instead, on arrival, she found herself forced into degrading sexual acts with multiple customers.

Angel – not her real name – is just one of thousands of young Nigerian women who have been trafficked into sexual slavery, and she recounted her story to counselors at the offices of the Transnational AIDS Prevention Among Migrant Prostitutes in Europe Project (TAMPEP), in Turin last week.

Among those in attendance was Leslie Ibeanusi, one of two AP peace fellows who is volunteering with TAMPEP this summer. Ms. Ibeanusi describes how Angel realized she had been enslaved in a recent 2-part blog (“Angel’s Story”):

“She (Angel) was alone in a new country and confused and scared. She shakingly followed the orders of her madam (also a Nigerian woman) and was placed on a street where she was to sell her body. Her first job was ‘sex by mouth’ for 20 euros.

“The room grew quiet, as if we all needed to process this information,” writes Ms. Ibeabusi. “In halting speech, she described how she finally escaped from her madam’s house and refused to continue the work she was doing. ‘I want to stop it. It is bad work. I want to go back to my parents in Nigeria.’ As I listened to her experience, I wept inside.”

Ms. Ibeanusi’s blog was published on the same day as the latest annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report from the US State Department, which rated the anti-trafficking efforts of 164 governments, which registered more than 100 cases of trafficking.

The report placed Italy on the “Tier 1” category and commended the government for tough measures, including an operation (“Spartacus”) earlier this year, which led to the arrest of 784 suspected traffickers. The approval is particularly noteworthy because Italian law allows prostitution – a policy which the Bush Administration strongly opposes.

The TIP report typically provokes a strong reaction outside the US. Many governments resent the fact that the US itself is excluded from review, even though up to 20,000 people are thought to be trafficked into the US each year.

Foreign advocates understand the report’s value as a way of putting pressure on their own governments but often find the rating arbitrary and confusing. Contacted by the

Advocacy Project (AP), Rosanna Paradiso, the Director of TAMPEP in Turin, suggested that the authorities in Turin could do much more to deter and arrest the “madams” and pimps who prey on girls like Angel.

“The police don’t have enough manpower to continuously arrest madams and traffickers,” she said Ms. Paradiso. “These people end up in the streets again, still doing the same thing.”

TAMPEP is considered a pioneer in the international fight against trafficking. As well as hiring “cultural mediators” to work with survivors like Angel in Turin, TAMPEP recently opened an office in Benin City, Nigeria, to spread the word about the dangers of trafficking and provide support for victims who are forcibly returned from Europe.

The Advocacy Project has made a major commitment to anti-trafficking this summer. Two peace fellows – Ms. Ibeanusi from George Washington University and Michelle Lanspa (Georgetown University) – are volunteering with TAMPEP in Italy, while Jennifer Hollinger (Georgetown University) is working in Albania with a local partner of the network Churches Against Sex Trafficking in Europe (CHASTE).

All three fellows are blogging about their experiences, and their early blogs have shown how good writing can help to spread the message of their hosts. Commenting on Ms. Ibdeabusi’s Story of Angel, one commentator writes: “Thank God for TAMPEP and keep doing the good work, girl. Take care of yourself.”

“Leslie, I’ve read this blog many times. Tears fall each time. You write beautifully,” writes another.

- For more on TAMPEP, visit <http://www.tampepitalia.it/>
- For Leslie’s blogs, visit: <http://advocacynet.org/author/leslie/>
- For Michelle’s blog, visit: <http://advocacynet.org/author/michelle/>
- For Jennifer’s blog, visit: <http://advocacynet.org/author/jennifer/>
- For the TIP report, visit: <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2007/index.htm>

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