

Women religious to combat human trafficking for 2010 sporting events

ROME - Criminals thinking about trafficking women and children for prostitution at the world's largest sporting events in 2010 will have to face the combined force of hundreds of women's religious orders.

The 252 orders currently involved in combating human trafficking in 36 countries formed a new international network called "Talita Kum," Aramaic for "Get Up," at the end of a June 15-18 meeting sponsored by the International Union of Superiors General and the International Organization for Migration.

Meeting in Rome, the network founders pledged their concrete support to sisters already working to ensure that women and children are not taken from their homes and sent to Canada to work as prostitutes during the February 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver or to South Africa for the June-July 2010 World Cup soccer tournament.

With funding from the U.S. State Department, the union of superiors and the international migration group have been working for years to train religious women to educate potential victims and their families about the realities of trafficking and to reach and assist victims by giving them shelter and spiritual, material and psychological assistance.

According to the superiors, 574 sisters are directly involved in fighting trafficking and in ministry to the victims.

In addition to lobbying governments in Canada and South Africa to make it more difficult for the criminal organizations behind trafficking to establish prostitution

rings at the 2010 sporting events, sisters in the two countries are preparing publicity materials and organizing conferences to raise people's awareness about trafficking.

"The traffickers are organized on a transnational level and we must do the same in order to fight them," said Consolata Sister Eugenia Bonetti, a leader of religious women in Italy working against trafficking.

Archbishop Antonio Maria Veglio, president of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers, told the women June 15 that they have "a role that is not only important, but is prophetic."

"There can be no doubt that the trafficking of women is a criminal phenomenon that violates basic human rights and that spiritually and materially destroys human lives," he said.

The archbishop thanked the sisters for their courage in going out onto the streets at night to let trafficked women know there is someone willing to protect and assist them, for their generosity in committing financial and human resources to the project and for their perseverance in accompanying the women in the long process of recovery.