

# J/P Alert

CONFERENCE OF MAJOR SUPERIORS OF MEN *JUSTICE AND PEACE OFFICE*

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*CMSM:*

- *assists major superiors in their role as leaders;*
- *promotes dialogue and collaboration with the conference of bishops and other major groups in church and society;*
- *provides a corporate influence in church and society.*

**March 2004**

## **Common Justice Themes in US and Europe**

Religious Conferences in Europe and organizations sponsored by religious institutes working at the UN and the European Union are actively involved in promoting justice issues in creative ways. Justice and Peace Director Stan De Boe, OSST and JP Committee member Seamus Finn, OMI, visited several conferences and organizations in Dublin, Geneva, Brussels, and London in January to make connections with these groups and to explore possible areas for collaboration in the future.

We visited the Justice Commission at the Conference of Religious of Ireland and the Mission Society of St. Patrick in Dublin, Franciscans International in Geneva, the Union of European Conferences of Major Superiors, the Dominicans and Jesuits in Brussels; and attended the Annual General Meeting of the Conference of Religious of England and Wales.

Several themes emerged as possible areas of collaboration. The religious conferences and Franciscans are very active in addressing human trafficking. This is also an important focus at both the UN and the EU. Religious in Europe are concerned that the emphasis of both international organizations focuses on trafficking for sexual exploitation and fails to give adequate attention to trafficking for economic exploitation. They

are attempting to get the EU to adopt a more comprehensive program regarding human trafficking. Response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa is also high on the agenda of European religious. Immigration and migration issues are also important to the European religious, given the large influx of people from Africa and Asia. Laws in some countries are being changed making it more difficult for immigrants to obtain any type of worker or permanent status. European religious are also very concerned about U.S. hegemony in the world. Opposition to the U.S.-led war on Iraq and the policies since have caused great distrust among European religious regarding the role of the U.S. in the world.

Religious in Ireland have established themselves as experts on the impact the government's budget has on the poor and marginalized in their society. Each year when the Irish government issues its annual budget the Justice Commission gathers a group of experts who analyze the budget and provide recommendations based on gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching. The analysis is issued within 24 hours of the release of the proposed budget. The analysis is highly respected and it has had a major impact in the budget process in Ireland.

Franciscans International in Geneva is working on many issues at the United Nations. Human rights in general, develop-

ment, human trafficking, migrants and refugees, and HIV/AIDS are some of the issues that FI follows. They also provide formation in human rights for the Franciscan family and are instrumental in bringing Franciscans from around the world with direct experience to address committees and officials at the UN.

In Brussels the Dominicans have created ESPACES, an organization that promotes the integration of spirituality, culture and society in Europe. Its goal is to contribute to the building of a European community by drawing from the rich spiritual, cultural, and social context of Europe. It provides analysis of events in Europe and at the European Union and works through the EU to promote just policies.

Jesuits in Brussels have established several programs, one of which we visited, the Church of the Resurrection, an ecumenical center in the heart of the EU complex that encourages faith-based dialogue on the issues being discussed at the EU. The Jesuits also sponsor the European Catholic Center in Brussels which promotes the uniting of Europe that keeps in mind social and cultural values that promote justice and human rights.

We also met several individuals who are active in promoting justice issues, particularly regarding human trafficking and immigration.

This trip to Europe has enabled the Justice and Peace Office to establish some new relationships with our colleagues in Europe and open the channel of communications to facilitate sharing of information and perhaps some collaboration on issues in the future.

### **Another Face of Human Trafficking**

In August 2001 CMSM and LCWR adopted a resolution opposing human trafficking. Since then the Conferences have become active in Trafficking in Persons Coalition, working in collaboration with many organizations to raise the awareness of this tragic human rights abuse and to combat the conditions that create this industry. A new coalition is developing focusing attention on a particular form of human trafficking, the Internet Marriage Broker programs. These internet sites enable people from the US to find spouses in other countries and bring them to the US. While there are many legitimate programs, a significant number of these sites are fronts for a form of trafficking that traps mostly women in abusive relation-

ships, sexual slavery, and indentured servitude. There are no regulations on this industry and the women trapped in this cycle of violence are not provided with any information about their rights or the resources available to them once they arrive in the US. Several women have been murdered after they refused to submit to their US husbands, hundreds are rejected and find themselves out of status and without any assistance, and many of the men who have been accused of abuse are allowed to use the services repeatedly until they find a "bride" to their liking. Half of all organizations assisting immigrants report that they are assisting women who have entered the U.S. through IMBs and are now victims of abuse and violence.

Two bills to regulate the marriage broker industry and protect the victims of this form of trafficking were introduced into the House the Senate. The International Marriage Broker Regulation Act of 2003 (S 1445 and HR 2949) would require all brokers to obtain permission from the "recruits" to disclose any information over the website and at the same time require all clients to provide personal history including former marriages and submit a criminal background check. IMBs would be required to disclose all client information to prospective brides. U.S. counsel offices would be required to provide marriage visa applicants with information about their rights, U.S. laws on domestic abuse, and resources in the language of the applicant. U.S. citizens would be limited to one application for a marriage visa per year (currently U.S. citizens can apply for multiple marriage visas). This legislation will have no adverse affect on legitimate applications for marriage visas but will protect women from programs that promise them a future of happiness and comfort, only to enslave them in abusive and dehumanizing situations.

The bills enjoy bipartisan support but more needs to be done. Contact your Senators or Representatives and ask them to cosponsor and support the International Marriage Broker Act. For more information about this legislation and the problems associated with this form of trafficking contact the Tahirih Justice Center, [www.tahirih.org](http://www.tahirih.org).

*Stan De Boe, OSST/Editor*