

Stop Trafficking !

Anti-Human Trafficking Newsletter



Awareness

Advocacy

Action

February 2007 Vol. 5 No. 2

This issue highlights issues of labor trafficking.

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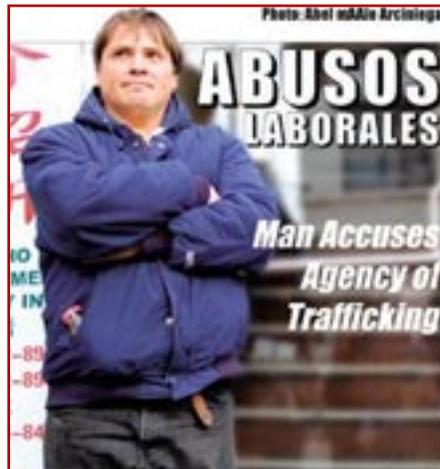
Chicago Employment Agency Investigated for Labor Abuses

Gildardo Ferreira, a native Mexican, was tricked by the *Ho Ho Employment Agency*, a Chicago employment agency, into taking a low-paying job in Michigan and then forced to work under horrible conditions, ultimately with no pay, says the *Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues* (CICWI).

Interfaith is accusing Ho Ho of participating in human trafficking by tricking workers into forced labor. According to CICWI's director, José Oliva, Ferreira is just one more on a growing list of people being forced into labor in the Midwest. He added that, in the case of Latino workers, the problem of trafficking is almost worse than other cases because the recruiting is done through open advertisement.

"Ho Ho runs an ad in 'Hoy,' a Spanish paper," Oliva said. "They are targeting the people least likely to defend themselves, the undocumented who don't speak the language."

Ferreira responded to an ad for a restaurant job through Ho Ho that promised \$2,100 a month, plus room and board, for washing trays. They put him in a van with no windows. From there he was taken to the China Star Buffet in Muskegon, MI and was handed to an employer who took him downstairs and put him in a base-



ment with bunkers. "The house was so dirty," Ferreira said. "We all had to share one small bathroom that was disgusting. I can't put into words how horrible the conditions were."

According to Interfaith, the workers were forced by owner Xin Fu Li to work 14-hour days, washing pots with intolerably hot water and had to buy their own gloves to prevent burns. After five days, "Ferreira was abruptly awakened at the house ... informed he had been fired, and thrown out. When he demanded his wage payment, he was attacked."

A copy of the police report filed on February 1, 2005, in Michigan, shows Ferreira flagged down police officers after being thrown out of the house but

is unclear as to the nature of the fight that occurred, citing language differences as the reason behind the fight.

Zhang Xiu Ying, owner of the agency denies the claims, adding she has never met Ferreira and asking for proof of her agency's involvement. She stated she has been in business for eight years and has never had any trouble, but that now her business has been affected by the negative publicity surrounding this scandal. "What that guy said is hard to believe," she said. "He needs to have proof and cannot accuse people like that. This is a totally made-up story – no such thing ever happened through our employment services."

Ferreira, with CICWI's help, filed complaints against Ho Ho through the Illinois Department of Labor and against China Star through the Michigan Department of Labor. In addition, a letter, dated March 8, 2005, from the Chicago Office of the FBI and addressed to Ferreira, confirmed that his case was under investigation.

(Source: *Extra: Two languages Una Voz*
Chicago's Bilingual Newspaper
February 2, 2006)

**The editor thanks
Barbara Pfarr SSND for this
information and that of the CICWI.**



Awareness

Laborer Struggles for Justice

Ricardo Veisaga, an Argentinian hoping to earn money to get back home after some personal tragedies, responded to an ad in a Chicago newspaper. In Spanish, it had listed an employment agency hiring people to work in Chinese restaurants. When he applied, Veisaga was promised more than \$1,000 a month, meals, “a comfortable bed” to sleep on and a chance to earn overtime. He was told to come immediately to the agency’s office.

Once there he was told there was no work in Chicago, but opportunities in Missouri and Indiana. “When I asked the agent when I had to come back, he said, ‘Right now. We’re leaving in half an hour,’” Veisaga said. He was given a fake social security card and a one-way Greyhound bus ticket to Indianapolis. There an employee of Szechwan Garden met him. By 11 p.m., they arrived at the restaurant and Veisaga spent two hours washing dishes.

Then he was driven a mile down the road to the owners’ home, where several others also lived. He slept on a mattress on the floor with another person, using his coat as a blanket and knapsack as a pillow. Five hours later he was awakened, joined others in the van, and was again dropped at the restaurant. He worked for 10-12 hours a day, with a 30-minute meal break, for 10 straight days. He was fed only rice and water and paid 51 cents an hour.

Soon abuse began - first verbal and then physical. Once he protected himself with a piece of metal while others threatened him with knives. Another time he also took up a knife to protect himself. “After the second brawl, I felt like my life was in danger. I was so paranoid that I would go into the walk-in refrigerators and place an

object to prevent somebody from closing it on me,” Veisaga said. At night they dead-bolted the bedroom door.

After a third beating he decided to escape and was able to break the lock on the bedroom window. After climbing out he thought of others who had experienced what he was going through and escaped, only to allow abuse to continue for others. He decided to stay and collect evidence of what was happening. “I didn’t want to be like those who came and disappeared. I wanted to do something to change this.”

He needed to find out where he was, knowing only it was 20 minutes from the Greyhound bus station. At the restaurant he managed to tear an address label off a package. He also managed to see the address on the mailbox of the owners’ home and eventually the street sign. He recorded the hours he worked — 104 over ten days — noting that as yet he had never been paid. Everything he documented he kept in his pocket so it would not be found.

Finally, he felt he had enough information. When his bedroom door was opened to go to work one morning, Veisaga was ready to tell them that he was leaving. “I had already analyzed the situation and was prepared for anything,” he said. “I didn’t know what they were capable of doing to me, but I was set on leaving, so I did.”

The owner called his wife to the restaurant. They talked for a while and then gave Veisaga \$53.30. They ushered him into the van and drove him to the Greyhound station, where he bought a bus ticket. The couple waited there a half hour until the bus drove off. Bruised and with infected scars, Veisaga arrived back in Chicago.

He made a bed beneath the Red Line tracks and went to sleep.

Eventually Veisaga got help through a Chicago Labor Group that brought in the FBI. He handed over the pieces of evidence, including a map of Indianapolis, with a dime-sized circle around the location of the owners’ residence and a copy of the social security card for “Branton Morataya” given to him by the employment agency. He provided a copy of his notes showing the hours he worked, the bus ticket, and a copy of a contract that entitled the employment agency to \$280 from his paycheck. The FBI agent found three other victims, all transported by the same employment agency to Chinese restaurants in Michigan and an investigation began.

The Taiwanese owners, a married couple with five children, who ran the restaurant for 16 years denied the charges. They said Veisaga was reclusive, never talked, ate little, and did not take his Saturday break. They asserted that they were providing housing, food and employment. When asked why he earned \$0.51 per hour, they said they had deducted the housing and food costs from his base salary. “We don’t say, ‘No, you can’t go anywhere,’” the wife asserted.

Building a solid case was not simple. Each of the victims had voluntarily left the employment agency. “Nobody had a gun to their head. They were allowed to walk to and from their car--or even to and from the restaurant, sometimes on their own, sometimes with one of the restaurant owners’ family,” agents said. “The issue was that they had apparently plenty of opportunity to just leave.”

Veisaga countered, “Their tone of voice and actions toward me were threatening. They would constantly harass me, give me menacing looks, pound on the kitchen table---which let me know, ‘Hey, you’ll do what we want you to do. Or we’ll hurt you.’”

The case aimed to prove “forced labor” i.e., that victims were threatened with “serious harm or physical restraint” if they didn’t work. Two



Awareness

Domestic Demand for Low Skilled Labor Force

Laborer

cont. pg. 2

years into the investigation, agents began to question the credibility of some of Veisaga's statements. In 2003, the U.S. Attorney's Office ultimately dropped the case.

But Elissa Steglich, managing attorney for the *Midwest Immigrant and Human Rights Center*, a Chicago-based nonprofit that provides legal assistance to immigrants, remains convinced that Veisaga was a victim of human trafficking. "He was recruited under false pretense, held through actual force, threats and physical isolation as a part of work. He was held in a coercive environment that prevented him from leaving---the intimidation at work and control from day to night." Employment agencies should be required to get guarantees of fair wages from restaurants and educate employees about their recourse if those terms aren't met.

José Oliva, of the *Chicago Interfaith Workers' Rights Center*, helped file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Labor, recouping \$572 of back wages and bus ticket expenses.

In 2006 Steglich applied for a T-visa on Veisaga's behalf. Meanwhile, Veisaga is considered deportable. U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, who co-sponsored the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005 to increase financial assistance to trafficking victims, says victims like Veisaga need more support. "These are people about as beaten down and fearful as you can get. To assist advocates to reach out to them to protect them is going to take some resources to do it. It's a question of putting money behind this, making it a priority." (Excerpted <http://www.chicagoreporter.com/2006/5-2006/trafficking/traffickingprint.htm>)

Experts say trafficking within the U.S. borders has long been a problem, but what gets the attention of politicians and the public is usually cases of international trafficking, often involving sex crimes. "It's easier to look at trafficking when there's other criminal activity going on [like prostitution]," said Elissa Steglich, managing attorney for the *Midwest Immigrant and Human Rights Center*, a Chicago-based nonprofit that provides legal assistance to immigrants.

Victims of domestic trafficking often come from a pool of society's most vulnerable, ranging from youth and the homeless to drug addicts and undocumented immigrants. "It has to do with the fact that there's a great demand for low-skilled or no-skilled labor, and the labor pool is generally people in the U.S. that are the most disenfranchised," said Steve Lize, co-author of a 2005 report on human trafficking by the National Institute of Justice. "They're more likely to be exploited in the more extreme ways, such as human trafficking."

Victims are often taken to job sites that are far from their friends and family. They are also hindered by their lack of English skills. And they could be afraid that their families would be harmed if they leave, or that they won't receive the money they desperately need.



The cycle of slavery for different individuals often has a common starting point: *an employment agency*. These agencies place advertisements in Spanish-language newspapers, offering everything new immigrants are looking for---housing, food, transportation and more than \$1,000 a month.

The *Chicago Reporter* examined the Friday classified sections of 'Hoy' during a six-month period in 2005. Friday is the Spanish-language newspaper's largest circulation day. Two employment agencies placed 66 ads, with almost the exact same heading: "Trabajos en rest. Chino" -- "Work in Chinese restaurant." Veisaga was hired through *Agencia de Empleo Latino*, which placed 44 of the ads. Similar ads are printed in Spanish-language newspapers throughout the country. It's difficult to determine which are legitimate.

When job applicants show up at such agencies, they are often told that the job is out of state, and that they must leave immediately on a Greyhound bus or in a van. Once on board, their identifying documents are confiscated. They are then forced to work long hours until they pay off the agency's referral fees, typically a few hundred dollars. Whatever is left is whittled to almost nothing as costs for housing and food are deducted.

Laura Germino, who combats slave labor on farms as a leader of the Florida-based Coalition of Immokalee Workers, said federal agencies could undermine trafficking by cracking down on all types of workplace exploitation. "You can't view trafficking in a vacuum," she said. "It takes root in industries that already have a range of labor violations -- sub-poverty wages, no benefits, no labor relations."



Awareness

Exploited in a LA Sweatshop

Florencia Molina was enticed to Los Angeles by a woman from her home in Mexico, who promised a job and free accommodations. *"I came to the United States with lots of dreams, but when I got here, my dreams were stolen,"* said Molina, 33, who left three children behind in Mexico.

On Jan. 1, 2002, she worked her first shift at the dressmaker's, sewing roughly 200 party dresses over 12 hours. Later, the shifts often stretched to 17 hours a day. Molina was locked into the shop at night — sleeping with a co-worker in a small storage room, without the option of showering or washing her clothes. The shop manager paid Molina roughly \$100 a week, confiscated her identify documents, and told her she would be arrested if she went to the authorities.

"For me, it was completely dark, without money, without English, no papers, nothing," Molina said. *"The owner told me, 'You can try to do whatever you want. Dogs in this country have more rights than you.'"*

After working 40 days, Molina found the courage to flee, and soon encountered FBI agents who were investigating the dress shop. They sought her cooperation in prosecuting the owner, and Molina — after difficult deliberations — agreed to help. *"It was really a hard decision,"* she said. *"The owner had always told me I would pay the consequences — or my family in Mexico would suffer — if I went to the authorities. But I thought to myself, 'I don't want one more person to be in the situation I was in.'"*

In exchange for her cooperation, Molina received a T-visa allowing her to remain in the United States for three years and then apply for permanent residence. Under the visa provisions, Molina's three children — 14, 12 and 9 — have received permission to join her in California. Now she works as a cashier at a discount store and is an anti-trafficking advocate. (Adapted from: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20051029/ap_on_re_us/trafficking_in_america)

Choir Boys Exploited

Given Kachepa was an 11-year-old orphan in his homeland of Zambia when he was recruited into a boys' choir that toured the United States for 18 months. Promises of education, free clothes and money for his family proved false, and the boys — constantly threatened by their handlers — were forced through an arduous concert schedule until authorities finally intervened.

Kachepa was eventually taken in by a Colleyville, TX couple who became his guardians. Now 20, he obtained a T-visa and entered college in 2006. He is now a spokesperson on behalf of trafficking victims.

"Human trafficking is so hidden you don't know who you're fighting — the victims are so scared, they're not going to tell you what's happening to them," said Given. *"The most important thing is constant education of people. There's help out there — but victims don't know it."*

(Adapted from: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20051029/ap_on_re_us/trafficking_in_america)

Chinese Restaurants Raided in Michigan

In 2005 authorities raided 17 Chinese restaurants around Michigan that they suspect of avoiding millions of dollars in taxes and importing undocumented workers as a *"modern version of indentured servants."*

Search warrants were served at 21 homes of suspected undocumented Chinese workers, who were suspected to be involved in the scheme. State Police Lt. Curt Schram said, *"It cost them X number of dollars to come to this country and they're trying to work off that debt."* Nearly 20 workers were living in one house with *"very spartan"* furnishings in Grand Rapids.

Investigators believe one family or related families own the restaurants, which are mostly in the central and west-central areas of the Lower Peninsula. The owners are suspected of claiming only a third of their actual income and sending part of the proceeds out of the country, while shortchanging the state and federal governments of millions of dollars in sales, unemployment and use taxes, police said. About \$400,000 in cash was seized.

Nine people were arrested at a Chinese buffet in Petoskey, and two people believed to be undocumented workers were charged with driver's license violations and jailed in Montcalm County. An additional 13 people were found to have deportation orders and were handed over to immigration authorities. *"It's some sort of modern version of indentured servants,"* the County prosecutor said.

The investigation began with one detective checking out a report in Nawaygo County and eventually involved 22 local, state and federal agencies, police said. Businesses in other states also are being looked at, although warrants have been served only in Michigan.



Advocacy

Trafficking Task Force for Workers Planned

Abused Maids Tell of Their Ordeals

About one in six families in Singapore employs a maid.

Debate about the rights of foreign domestic workers in Singapore is continuing, after authorities rejected calls for maids to be given a mandatory day off each week.

A ministry official said that changing the law would inconvenience households but a recent report from *Human Rights Watch* showed some maids face overwork, small food rations and the denial of social contact.

The BBC's *World Have Your Say* program spoke to two Filipina women who went to Singapore to become domestic workers, but suffered at the hands of their employers. Esther and Thona (not their real names) escaped their abusers and found safety in a house for victims called *Home*. They spoke to BBC from the refuge.

ESTHER, 30

"I worked every day. I didn't have a day off because it was stated in the contract that only after six months did I get my off day, and after that I would get one each month.

I worked in two houses but after five months I ran away because of insufficient food and insufficient sleep.

I worked every day from 6:00 in the morning to midnight but sometimes I had to get up in the middle of the

The *Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues* (CICWI) Workers' Center has worked with several workers who have been trafficked. Their experiences follow the national profile: *males, desperate for money, went to a local unemployment agency that was not registered with the state and were taken away to work in the restaurant/food service industry.*

Nationally, the number of trafficked persons has tripled in the past few years: 75% are women who are trafficked as sex workers; 25% are males, aged 25-40, who perform hard manual labor in either farm work or food-related industries. Most trafficked males are Latino and Chinese. The problem is pervasive. Trafficking is seldom local; generally workers are taken out of their local environment for work in a distant, isolated area. To take workers away from what they know keeps them powerless.

The object of CICWI's Interfaith Trafficking Task Force is to create an Interfaith Trafficking Task Force that will serve as a vehicle for faith leaders to concretely support workers who have been trafficked, as well as to hold public officials accountable to protect



workers from abuse at the hands of human traffickers. The Task Force hopes to pressure responsible authorities to use their power to institutionalize policies and procedures to assure that the trafficking of local workers is stopped.

Organizers intend to form an advisory board made up of key local leaders to broaden its base. It plans to gather information through faith communities (Latino, Polish and Asian), survey workers, conduct speaking tours to raise awareness and encourage reporting of abuses, distribute educational materials, and send delegations to advocate public officials to strategize ways to address the problem.

Information may be obtained through Barbara Pfarr SSND at: bpfarr@iwj.org

Maids cont.

night because I was also looking after a three-year-old child.

After dinner I had to wait for all the members of the family to finish their meal and then I would be allowed to eat, but only their leftovers.

They always scolded me for little things. They were very fussy and wanted everything to be perfect. I could not do the work because I didn't have enough food and I didn't have enough strength. Sometimes I received a scolding because I didn't have the strength to work.

I wanted to go out but they said they had to accompany me. I didn't have any freedom. They wouldn't let me

talk to my Filipino colleagues. They didn't want me to make friends with them.

It felt like I was in a prison. I couldn't bear it any more and that's why I ran away.

Every time I looked for a new employer the pain was still there. I felt that this history was haunting me.

I am trying to move on. Here at Home I feel I have found a family but I still really miss my mother."

THONA, 26

"My employer did not treat me well. If I did a simple mistake they shouted at me, telling me bad words and



Action

Garment Factory Owner Convicted: 40 Year Sentence

Kil Soo Lee, the former owner of the *American Samoa Daewoosa* garment factory was sentenced to 40 years in prison for his role in holding over 200 victims in forced servitude.

Lee was charged in 2001, in the U.S. District Court in Hawaii, with illegally confining and using as forced labor over 200 Vietnamese and Chinese garment workers. He was convicted of numerous federal criminal violations, including involuntary servitude, extortion and money laundering in 2003.

Workers were recruited from China and from state-owned labor export companies in Vietnam. They paid fees of approximately \$5,000 to \$8,000 to gain employment at the Daewoosa factory and risked retaliation and punishment at home if deported back to their native lands. Lee and his collaborators preyed on this vulnerability, subjecting laborers to poor conditions and minimal pay. Motivated by greed and with no regard for human dignity, these traffickers exploited more than 200 Vietnamese and Chinese workers.

In March of 1999, after months of mistreatment, the workers complained about their plight and attempted to obtain food from local residents. Lee retaliated, using arrests, deportations, food deprivation and brutal physical beatings to force workers to cooperate. In one episode, a woman was beaten so badly that she lost an eye. This abuse continued through 2000.

Kil Soo Lee was the third and last individual convicted in this case. In 2002, two co-conspirators, a manager and a garment worker, pleaded guilty to trafficking charges and were sentenced to 70 months and 51 months, respectively, in January 2004.

This case was prosecuted by attorneys from the *Criminal Section of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division* and was investigated by the Honolulu regional office of the FBI. The victim witness coordinator in the U.S. Attorney's Office also assisted with the case. (<http://www.usdoj.gov>)

Maids *cont. pg. 5*

sometimes they beat me. The first time was May 20, 2005, I cannot forget it. She slapped me because I forgot to cook the porridge on time. The second time she beat me was May 30, 2005. She pushed me in my breasts and it is still very painful.

I was upset and I said to my employer 'Why do you beat me?' and my employer said 'Why should I not beat you?' My employer sent me back to my agency and then I ran away. I ran away on June 17, 2005. I went to Home. I found Home and I have stayed here in the shelter for nine months already. I really miss my family. I don't have money to go back. I would be happy if I could go back to the Philippines, if I could reach my own country."

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4806130.stm>

Women Religious Involved in 'Rescue and Restore' Campaign

Under the *Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000* (TVPA) the U.S. *Dept. of Health and Human Services* (HHS) serves as the agency responsible for helping victims of human trafficking become eligible to receive benefits and services as they rebuild their lives safely in the U.S.

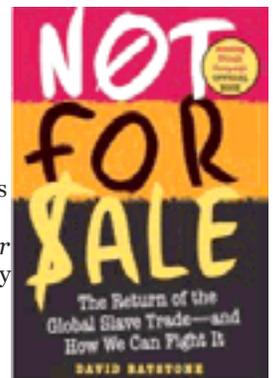
As part of this effort, HHS initiated the *Rescue & Restore campaign* in 2003 to help identify and assist victims of human trafficking in the U.S. The first phase of the campaign focuses on outreach to health care providers, social service organizations and the law enforcement community. These individuals would most likely encounter victims on a daily basis, but may not recognize them as victims of human trafficking. They may be the only outsiders with the chance to help victims. Once trained, these intermediaries are better able to recognize clues and ask the right questions.

In November 2005 the *Houston Rescue and Restore Coalition* was formed. Since then over 30 religious and nonprofit organizations have joined the Coalition, including the *Houston Dominican Sisters* and the *Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word*. The Coalition meets quarterly and has a rotating Coordinator.

Goals of the Coalition include: *Post Card Campaign* to major companies of feminine hygiene products requesting the Hotline number (1-888-3737-888) be put on their products; *Health-care training workshops* for

Emergency Room and Health Clinic personnel; *Safe Housing* for rescued victims; and *legislative advocacy*.

David Batstone journeyed to five continents to study the rise of the modern slave trade and explore strategies to undermine it. His book, *Not For Sale*, published by HarperSF comes out Feb. 7, 2007.





Toll-Free 24/7 Hotline
National Human Trafficking
Resource Center
1.888.3737.888

Action

Save the Date!

'Putting Out the Welcome Mat'

The workshop, designed for those interested in creating or supporting a home for human trafficking survivors, is sponsored by the *Northern California Coalition Against Trafficking*, comprised of 15 religious congregations collaborating to stop global trafficking. The workshop will be held at *Mercy High School*, 3250 19th Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94132.



March 10, 2007
10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

To register send your name, address, phone and e-mail along with \$15.00 (\$10.00 before Feb. 28, 2007) to: Welcome Mat c/o Sisters of Mercy, 535 Sacramento Street, Auburn, CA 95603-5699 or contact Michele Gorman RSM: mgorman@mercysisters.org

Trafficking in Persons Interim Assessment

The *Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons* released the *Report* on January 19, 2007. The Report assesses the concrete actions a government has taken to address the key deficiencies highlighted in the *June 2006 TIP Report* (See col. 3).

Important Website

The *U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office of Migration and Refugee Services* (USCCB MRS) is developing a website intended to be a source of resources and information on *child trafficking, particularly in the U.S. context.* (See col. 3).

Informative Web Sites: (Each contains information related to human trafficking)

Other Labor Articles: *The Little Hands of the Stone Quarries*

<http://www.humantrafficking.org/publications/404>

Swept Under the Rug: Abuses Against Domestic Workers Around the World

<http://www.humantrafficking.org/publications/417>

<http://www.humantrafficking.org/updates/399>

TIP Interim Report

<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/rpt/78948.htm>

USCCB MRS-Children

<http://www.brycs.org/childtrafficking.htm>

SSND NGO Report to UN CSW

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw51/OfficialDocuments.html>

Corporate Stance

Members of the *Congregation of St. Agnes* headquartered in Fond du Lac, WI have taken a corporate stance against human trafficking. It is the 19th congregation to notify *Stop Trafficking* of their corporate, public commitment.

Upcoming UN Commission on the Status of Women

Three Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) will join the School Sisters of Notre Dame's (SSND) delegation of 25 students and adults representing Africa, Europe, Latin America and North America to participate in the 51st session of the *Commission on the Status of Women* (CSW) Feb. 26 - Mar. 9 at the UN.

The CSW, dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women, is a functional commission of the *UN Economic and Social Council* (ECOSOC). Every year, representatives of member states gather at the UN to evaluate progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards and formulate concrete policies to promote gender equality and advancement of women worldwide. The priority theme for 2007 is "the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child."

Educational Materials for Parishes

Sheila Novak SDS has compiled a practical guide for parish staff to use in educating their faith community about human trafficking and providing for them realistic actions to address the issue. For a free copy of the 33-page packet contact Sheila at: stoptraffick@aol.com

Stop Trafficking! is dedicated exclusively to fostering an exchange of information among religious congregations, their friends and collaborating organizations, working to eliminate all forms of trafficking of human beings.

Use the following web address to access back issues of *Stop Trafficking!*
<http://homepage.mac.com/srjeanschafer/sds/stoptraffic/index.html>

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