

TRAFFICKING

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Coalition members gathered at the headquarters of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Jan. 29 for:

- A presentation by and discussion with Dan Bryant, assistant attorney general for legal policy in the U.S. Department of Justice.

- An update on reauthorization of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000.

- A look at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement's public-awareness campaign on human trafficking, with an eye toward how coalition members can be involved.

But another important aspect of the meeting came during lunch, when coalition members traded information about their organization's efforts against human trafficking during the past three months.

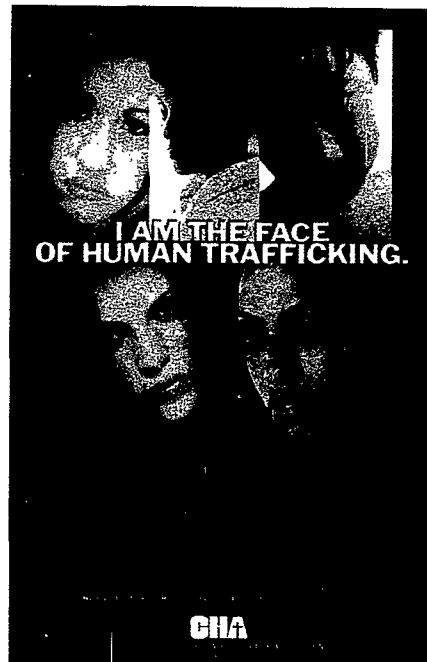
Each organization approaches the problem from a different angle, Latuda said.

The Catholic Health Association, for example, is offering posters for use in emergency rooms, doctors' offices or clinics to help health-care providers identify those who have been subjected to trafficking. The poster also gives information on how to assist victims.

Patients who show signs of agitation, isolation, malnourishment, physical or sexual abuse and those who rely on "a companion" to tell their story may be victims of trafficking, the poster says.

Coalition members such as MRS and Catholic Relief Services are more involved in providing direct services to victims of trafficking here and abroad.

Catholic Charities USA has re-



The Catholic Health Association is offering this poster to hospitals, doctor's offices and clinics to help health-care providers identify people subjected to human trafficking.

sponded by educating its own network of social-service agencies about the signs of trafficking and the assistance available to victims.

Still other members confront the trafficking issue from a legal standpoint or serve as victim advocates.

The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, a U.S. law, defines "severe forms of trafficking in persons" as "sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion" or involves a minor or "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud

or coercion."

The victims of trafficking "often believe they are coming here to find the American dream," Latuda said. Instead they find forced labor, sexual exploitation or other contemporary forms of slavery.

Because of the lack of legal immigration options, they sometimes pay people to smuggle them into the United States "and sometimes (the smugglers) turn out to be traffickers who enslave them," she said.

If victims of trafficking can be identified and certified by the federal government's Office of Refugee Resettlement, they become eligible under the law for the same benefits and services available to a refugee. The benefits may include food stamps, Medicaid, social services such as job preparation and English-language classes, and Social Security and welfare payments.

But in the three years since passage of the law, only 500 trafficking victims have been certified. Ninety percent of those were identified through Catholic ministers or social-service agencies, Latuda said.

And what should someone do when he or she suspects that a person might be a victim of trafficking?

Anyone who suspects a trafficking situation that has not yet been reported or investigated should start by calling the Justice Department's "trafficking in persons and worker exploitation task force complaint line" at 888/428-7581, Latuda advised. That will initiate a federal investigation into the matter.

Latuda and others like her at MRS, who can be reached at 202/541-3385, can help the trafficked person connect with local social-service agencies that will help them before and after they are certified as trafficking victims.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

HOT LINE PLANNED

NEW YORK (CNS) — Covenant House, the agency devoted to serving homeless and runaway youths, has received a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to operate a hot line for victims of human trafficking.

The contract for the program, initiated under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2002 and managed by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, provides \$270,000 for the first year.

The hot line will be managed by Gilbert Ortiz, who directed a state-supported drug program for the Diocese of Brooklyn before becoming director of Covenant House's "nineline" program. The "nineline" offers a number — 800/999-9999 — that young people in trouble can call for counseling and referral to sources of help.

In a telephone interview March 4, he said the government planned to begin publicizing the trafficking hot line in Atlanta, Philadelphia and Phoenix within a month and expand to 10 other cities later.

The hot line will be available 24 hours a day, every day, and provide counselors in Spanish as well as English. Hookups will be available for callers to talk to professional interpreters who know other languages.

Ortiz said that the hot line will offer confidentiality and counselors will not contact police or other law enforcement officials except at the caller's request.

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