

Press Release
October 15, 2004

**Trafficking of Women and Children:
Sisters of the Holy Names Address the Issue**

The Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, (SNJM) an international religious order of about 1400 members have announced a campaign of education and action in response to the international trafficking in women and children for purposes of sexual exploitation and forced child labor.

According to the group's leader, Sister Mary Pat LeRoy, "We are proud to be in solidarity with 800 women's orders, representing one million members throughout the world, who have pledged to work toward the eradication of this outrageous and growing epidemic of trafficking in women and children. We call on our political and judicial leaders to address this issue with courage."

The educational programs will take place primarily in Canada and the United States, in areas where most of the sisters regularly minister. The order has also published an educational packet, *Trafficking in Women and Children*, available in three languages. It is being used in Canada, the United States, Africa, and Central and South America.

A play *Lost in Trafficking*, originally written in French and performed by *Theatre Parminou*, was translated by the sisters into English. Financial support by the sisters of Quebec has enabled the play to be presented 14 times in Quebec and it will be performed in November at the International Congress on the Rights of Children that will be held in Montreal.

In addition, members of the order advocate for policies and programs that address problems of trafficking and their solutions through a non-governmental organization, UNANIMA International that they sponsor. In January 2005, Sister Catherine Ferguson, SNJM, Director of UNANIMA and a participant at the United Nations, will coordinate a workshop in New York for invited guests from the United States, Brazil, Ireland, Australia, Canada, Italy, and Chile to develop international strategies to eliminate trafficking. Each of the invited guests works with trafficking issues in her respective country.

Sisters Lise Gagnon, SNJM, and Celine Dubé, CND (Congregation of Notre Dame) co-facilitate an educational session on the trafficking of women in Quebec Province. To date they have met with 350 participants.

The Sisters of the Holy Names are collaborating with other orders of women throughout the world in this effort. In 2001 the International Union of Superior Generals, representing one million sisters throughout the world, officially declared its commitment "to address at every level the abuse and sexual exploitation of women and children, with particular attention to the trafficking of women which has become a lucrative multi-national business."

As many as 4,000,000 women and children are trafficked across international borders each year. A report by the Canadian Solicitor General's Office estimates that those profiting from the illegal trafficking in women and children in Canada earn as much as

\$400 million annually. According to the U.S. State Department, as many as 50,000 women are trafficked annually to the United States.

Brazil is the largest Latin American source of women in the sex trade in Europe according to the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights. After arms and drugs, the trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation is the third most lucrative business in the world for organized crime.

The headquarters of the Sisters of the Holy Names is in Montreal, Quebec.

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