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Romanian Patriarchate, Government and Bucharest Municipality commit to fight together against human trafficking



On Human Rights Day (December 10, 2020), the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Internal Affairs Ministry's Romanian Agency Against Human Trafficking (ANITP) and the Municipality of Bucharest signed a cooperation protocol to prevent and fight against human trafficking.

The event was held with the participation of His Excellency Adrian Zuckerman, the US Ambassador to Romania, who has set the fight against human trafficking as a priority of his mandate.

The Romanian Patriarchate was represented by His Grace Varlaam of Ploiești, Patriarchal Auxiliary Bishop.

On behalf of the authorities, the following were present: Laurențiu Ștefan, Presidential Advisor; Romania's Acting Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă; former Prime Minister Ludovic Orban; Minister of Internal Affairs Marcel Vela; Minister of Justice Cătălin Predoiu; ANITP Director Max Nicolae, and Nicușor Dan, General Mayor of Bucharest.

The Romanian Patriarchate staff will learn to recognize human trafficking victims

The protocol signed between the Romanian Patriarchate and ANITP provides for common local, regional and national actions of prevention, and creation and distribution of information materials on the issue of human trafficking.

ANITP experts will instruct the Romanian Patriarchate staff on how to recognize possible victims of human trafficking. This will enable priests and youth workers to better prevent the phenomenon and support the victims.

The common activities will be promoted on the basilica.ro website and in the usual communication with mass-media.

HG Varlaam: The Church prevents social risks by educating children based on Christian values

At the signing ceremony, His Grace Varlaam of Ploiești mentioned the current protocol is the second signed by the Romanian Orthodox Church with the government after the one established in 2003, at the time of Patriarch Teoctist.

"The Church can substantially contribute to preventing human trafficking in future and also, even more, to the spiritual recovery of the victims of this tragedy which unfolds in the whole world", said the patriarchal auxiliary bishop.

"From this perspective, I am glad this event takes place on Human Rights Day. Both human rights and the philosophy of the fight against human trafficking are rooted in Christian teaching, in our Lord Jesus Christ's Gospel," he added.

The hierarch said the Church is already working on preventing the phenomenon by staying close to the youth and teaching them Christian values.

“Christian values are sustained through the priest and the Religion teacher and, when members of a community become vulnerable through lack of education or poverty, the Church finds appropriate solutions in each community,” he said.

The hierarch emphasized the Church is already experienced in implementing nation-wide projects to prevent social risks.

For instance, the program *Chose School*, run in partnership with World Vision International, has helped 32,000 children continue their education.

“We worked on this because we believed that, if we prepare them well enough for life, children will also be equipped with the necessary skills that can make them able to resist the temptations and traps that the international networks of human trafficking prepare for them,” explained His Grace Varlaam.

The Church is well-positioned in the Romanian diaspora to support victims of human trafficking

“Our Church and the priests from the Romanian diaspora in the West have extensive experience in reintegrating victims of human trafficking. We know they carry the stigmata of a painful and traumatizing experience and that healing is very difficult and it only comes through constant striving,” said the patriarchal auxiliary bishop.

“This cooperation protocol opens special opportunities with a view to the year 2021, proclaimed by the Romanian Orthodox Church as the Year of the Romanian Diaspora since we know that the final destination of most victims trafficked from Romania is Western Europe”, continued the hierarch.

“Next year, our parishes from the diaspora will be able to develop very interesting and efficient programs in cooperation with the Romanian Agency Against Human Trafficking,” he added.

“I wish to thank His Excellency [Adrian Zuckerman], the Ambassador of the United States of America, for the special attention he paid to the tragedy of human trafficking. I thank him in the name of our Church for his appreciatory remarks about it and we thank him for seeing in the Romanian Orthodox Church a viable and committed partner for the

government and the other institutions involved in the fight against this scourge”, concluded Patriarchal Auxiliary Bishop Varlaam of Ploiești.

Nicolae Ciucă: Migration has led to an increase in human trafficking

“This event is a new stage of an effort in which authorities, civil society, the Church and each of us need to join. It is important to raise awareness on modern slavery, a scourge which needs to be eradicated,” declared Acting Premier Nicolae Ciucă.

“Freedom is a universal fundamental right and the foremost value of humanity. In all of its forms, human trafficking is an open wound of contemporary society, affecting, sometimes irreparably, its victims,” he added in the speech held at the event.

“Migration has led to an increase in human trafficking, speculating on the vulnerabilities of the helpless people living in poverty. Statistics place Romania in the top of the migration phenomenon,” continued Nicolae Ciucă.

“It is a sad reality that we need to accept and for which we are bound to find solutions here, in the country, in order to stop the phenomenon,” he added.

“The cooperation agreement signed today needs instruments, actions and real and practical involvement of those who can contribute to the eradication of human trafficking. We need results. (...) Judiciary efforts against human trafficking need to be intensified. So does the fight against organized crime.”

Adrian Zuckerman: Church has a special place in Romania, its help is welcome and vital

“It is fitting that we gather here on the International Human Rights Day. For today, Romania has taken a historic step protecting and advancing human rights,” said the US Ambassador to Romania.

“Human trafficking is the embodiment of evil. It is barbaric, it is cruel, it had no place in civilized society,” the diplomat added.

“Human traffickers around the world, including the organized crime here in Romania, prey upon their fellow citizens – men, women and young children – who are subjected to forced labour and sexual exploitation as a result of violence, fraud

or coercion. Also, tech criminals may profit,” said Adrian Zuckerman.

“As stewards of the public trust, we owe a sacred duty to our citizens to remain resolute in our efforts,” affirmed the ambassador.

“There is a new dawn breaking in Romania, a new approach to addressing the human trafficking sins and omissions of the past and seeking a better way forward.”

The diplomat also declared: “We are heartened by the many recent successes of prosecutors and law enforcement officers from DIICOT, DCCO and others in tackling organized crime and human trafficking.”

“We also applaud the government, the Orthodox Church and the City of Bucharest in their efforts to shine a spotlight on the issue of human trafficking and by working together and also reaching out to non-governmental organizations to address the critical needs of the victims and by placing greater emphasis on prevention, protection and care,” added the ambassador.

“Bishop Varlaam Ploieşteanul, thank you for joining with the government and city in this fight against human trafficking. The Church has a special place within Romania and your help is welcome and vital. Thank you!”

Romania and human trafficking

The vast majority of human trafficking victims in the European Union come from Romania.

A recent [report](#) of the US Stated Department has emphasized that in Romania “services for child trafficking victims remained inadequate” and that “authorities investigated, prosecuted, and convicted fewer traffickers”.

This has made the US Ambassador Adrian Zuckerman to offer his support to Romanian authorities in their efforts to fight human trafficking.

Most of the victims are minors and women, coming especially from poor and disorganized families. They are introduced into prostitution by deceit.

The favoured method of deceitful recruitment is the *Loverboy* method: the trafficker pretends to be in love with the victim, makes her fall in love with him, then he forces her to sell her body through different methods of coercion or blackmail. Sometimes he simply sells her after he has earned her trust.

Painful statistics

- [74%](#) of human trafficking victims in EU are from Romania;
- 61% of human trafficking victims in EU are recruited for sexual exploitation;
- Only [0.2-0.4%](#) of the victims manage to escape, of which even fewer file a complaint against their traffickers;
- Only 1 in 100,000 traffickers are convicted;
- 1 in 4 victims is underage.