

New Millennium Slavery: Violence against Women

"Women" shall mean human beings of the female sex.

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From the Protocol on Model Legislation on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children, Annex to the International Pact on Security, Stability and Development of the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

Why are we asked to consider Violence against Women under New Millennium Slavery? It is obvious that there is nothing new about a millennia-old phenomenon. Yet, this Protocol in which negotiation I participated, was signed in 2006, the twenty-first century!

The Canadian Department of Justice lists six forms of abuse against women – for the one category of spousal abuse. Add sexual violence as a means of war, an instrument of conflict; systemic exploitation of women as cheap labour in certain global industries to round out the picture.

It makes sense to conclude that eliminating violence against women is a necessary condition to combatting the new forms of enslavement studied in this conference. We may well ask however why this scandal persists despite all efforts deployed by the international community since 1995.

As the detailed 2013 document of UN Women argues, none of the 17 objectives identified in the Framework for Sustainable Development 2015-2030 will be met if the *human dignity of women* is not taken as given. Recognition of this fact has to be widespread, visible and measurable.

Eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls has to be the first target.

The core factors of persisting violence are known: an enabling culture in family, institutions and society. Impunity and desensitization to a sexualized culture, personal and institutional, allow this violence to persist. Some forms of violence are exacerbated by new technologies especially social media and unprecedented global flows of workers and migrants.

Elements of a solution:

Targets, step-by-step modelling suited to different contexts, building on the lessons learnt from the Millennium Development Goals and ongoing statistical work without which progress cannot be measured.

It is time to compute the reputational damage and the professional, efficiency and material costs of avoiding the issue of violence and exploitation of women. This may help towards a conversion of the heart and an evolution of mentalities. Without this, the measures will fail.

This means: Speaking out without fear of retribution, publicly denouncing violence as a crime, refusing to keep it hidden as a domestic issue. Men as well as women need to commit fully, working amongst peers to deter perpetrators. Recovery measures also continue e.g. accessibility to legal, protective and social services.

It also means: education, improving Catholic Social Teachings, working with other faith groups.

Violence against Women is not a 'women's issue': it's our human rights at stake.