



PUBLICATIONS

- Proceedings of the 2013 Workshop
- Proceedings of the 2014 Youth Symposium
- Proceedings of the 2015 PASS Plenary Session
- Proceedings of the 2015 Mayors' Summit
- Proceedings of the 2015 Youth Symposium
- Proceedings of the 2016 Judges' Summit
- Proceedings of the 2016 Vatican Youth Symposium
- Proceedings of the 2017 Vatican Youth Symposium

Human Trafficking Situation in Spain: The Case of African Immigrants



Alejandra Scelles Torres
Fondation Scelles, Madrid/Paris

**Young People Against Prostitution and Human Trafficking:
The Greatest Violence Against Human Beings**
Casina Pio IV
Vatican City, 15-16 November 2014

Good Afternoon,

My name is Alejandra; I am here to represent our foundation (Fondation Scelles). First of all, I would like to thank the organizers and all the participants of this Symposium.

I am going to talk about prostitution in Spain, one of the countries with the highest number of prostitutes in the world. Trafficking, prostitution, sexual exploitation of girls and women is an extreme form of violence against women, an attack against human dignity, an expression of inequality that girls and women throughout the world suffer. My presentation focuses on human rights, in particular women's rights. We want to urgently point out the situation of inequality of tens of thousands of women in Spain to which the Spanish authorities do not seem to provide any real solution.

Owing to the social changes Spain has experienced in the last few decades, prostitution has changed a lot in Spain. "Traditional" prostitution, which was the prostitution of women in the 1980s who generally did it out of their own will and who tended to be Spanish and to engage in prostitution in the areas in which they lived, has changed. In the 1990s many Latin-American women arrived. They generally worked in clubs along the streets. Subsequently, many African women were trafficked into the country. Toward the end of the 1990s we started seeing street prostitution with women from Eastern Europe.

More than 90% of the women who are prostitutes in Spain are victims of trafficking, and most prostitution takes place behind closed doors, in closed spaces. The figures of course are never official, but estimates range between 300,000-400,000 people practicing prostitution and 3,000 different centers dedicated to that. Other figures say that there are about 300,000 women in prostitution, which is a very similar number to the total number of prostitutes in Germany, even though the population of Spain is half the German one. Moreover, prostitution is becoming more and more a childhood problem: clients want younger and younger, more and more vulnerable women so we see many more underage girls. The current economic crisis has made the situation even worse: youth unemployment is over 50% in many parts of Spain, and this has led to a new situation of prostitution in Spain. Starting from 2012 the price of public universities has increased, there are much fewer scholarships and many students can no longer pay for their education. The lack of job opportunities makes it very difficult for young people to find a dignified way of living. The economic situation in my country is so bad that many families have all their members unemployed and barely survive on social benefits. Therefore, prostitution, to many of them, appears as the only way out, the only solution. We see more and more young Spanish women and girls entering the prostitution market to pay for their studies or simply to help their family survive.

Spain is a transit country and a receiving country for victims of trafficking and sex exploitation. Most women come from Central America, from South-Eastern Europe and from Sub-Saharan Africa – mostly women and girls from Nigeria. Nigerian women are forced, kidnapped or deceived with false promises of finding jobs; they embark on a very long and difficult journey crossing the African continent and come to Spain in very fragile boats or hidden in cars, they suffer sexual abuse and violations by the traffickers or the mafia bosses. They are threatened with having their families killed if they escape and traffickers often also use voodoo rites that terrorize them... and, of course, they are in an irregular situation in Spain.

Sexual exploitation of women and children is a very good business in Spain, and it is growing. There is more dark money in prostitution than in any other part of the economy – more than weapons and drugs trafficking. Its revenues can reach up to 5 million euros per day and the victims are losing their freedom, their dignity, as was said by the Spanish Minister of the Interior when he presented the new national plan against human trafficking in 2013.

Prostitution is not criminalized in Spain but there are many local and regional laws and regulations that refer to health, city regulations and other things of the sort. In some cities municipal laws have been adopted to protect public areas, and prostitutes and clients are fined up to €3,000. The women who engage in prostitution are mostly trafficking victims as we have seen, but they are criminalized and are considered to be responsible for the fact that they are selling sex, which puts them in an even more vulnerable situation. The clients generally do not have to pay fines; they usually manage to escape being put in a difficult situation.

According to a 2011 report, 99% of the demand for prostitution comes from men. Spain is one of the first countries in the world and the first country in Europe in terms of demand for prostitution. 39% of men have been with a prostitute at least once in their life. 50% of Spanish clients are married or live with a woman, and almost half of them have children. Most of those who go with prostitutes are aware of the fact that the women are doing so against their will.

There is no real rejection of prostitution in Spain: it is considered to be sort of normal, there is no social questioning, no limitations. Young people go with prostitutes as a form of leisure with their friends, businessmen celebrate their successes by going with prostitutes. This paves the way to human trafficking, and makes the objectification of women's bodies socially acceptable. This is reinforced by audio-visual and digital media that broadcast TV series and movies that convey the message that prostitution and the sale of women's bodies is normal.

The main Spanish newspapers publish announcements for sex services, like we heard happens in Bolivia. There are only two newspapers that do not allow this type of advertising. It is estimated that this business is worth more than 40 million euros. There was a lot of debate around this in 2010, and many called for the elimination of any form of advertising of prostitution in written press. Many women's organizations which defend women's rights fought for that. In September 2010 a bill was introduced in congress but in the end, it did not move forward, so we continue to have all these announcements of prostitution services in the newspapers because they have not been banned.

Concerning legislation, Spain has always had an abolitionist position. However, neither offering sexual services nor paying for them is criminalized. What is criminalized is pimping. Spain signed and ratified the Palermo Protocol of 2000, the European Convention against Human Trafficking in 2008, and 2010 was important in terms of anti-trafficking laws – Spain modified its criminal code to introduce a clear distinction between trafficking of human beings and illegal migration. They are two different offences and the reform has taken that into account. There has also been a modification of the article 59, which allows for the victims who are in an irregular situation for a period of recovering and reflection, so that they can evaluate the possibility of cooperating with justice providing information. Nevertheless, these legal reforms that have been introduced in the last years, have been considered insufficient by several NGOs and associations, because they lack a gender and human rights-based spirit.

There are a number of campaigns against sexual exploitation. We, the young, must combine our efforts and work in grassroots organizations to try to deal with trafficking of women and girls forced to be prostitutes, a phenomenon that is still largely ignored, it is still largely invisible to the vast majority of people. And since this is an intolerable violation of human rights of unknown scale, we cannot simply sit by and watch. Our world is a world of exploitation, of globalization of indifference, as Pope Francis said, a world in which our democratic and Christian values are not necessarily finding the place they need. So we must continue to fight with all the instruments we have – mainly our words and peaceful action.

My three recommendations, as a young person, is to reaffirm that women's bodies are not for sale. Women and girls are not objects that can be bought and sold to satisfy the sexual needs of men. In order for this market of exploitation not to continue in the future and not let our children live in a world with sexual exploitation, we must improve education. An education of peace as a way to solve conflicts; an education of equality between boys and girls; and an education of sexuality for boys and girls that develops a model of interpersonal relations that gives central role to the respect of people, to their sexual freedom in conditions of equality.

We also need to enhance the visibility of the demand of prostitution as one of the main reasons why we have trafficking, and we must enhance the visibility of the figure of the client, who is responsible. The clients of prostitution have a clear and inescapable role in the system of prostitution, of which they play a necessary role. They perpetuate the exploitation of women and girls. Without demand there is no prostitution, and without prostitution there is no trafficking. I also would like to point out the role of audio-visual, digital media, which are a very important factor in the prostitution market. Today we live in a society which is said to be equal between men and women but that is not true. The media give us an image of women as sexual objects: their bodies are used to sell products to the male population, and this generates a lot of money.

I would like to conclude with a few words on our foundation, the Scelles Foundation: it was founded by my great-grandfather's brother and his wife and it does a lot of important work in raising awareness, publishing publications, and reports on sexual exploitation. It also does political work, advocating for new laws against this attack to human rights. As a young girl of the 21st century, as a Spanish girl, as citizen of the world and as a member of the Scelles Foundation, I would like us all to unite and join our forces to stand side by side to continue fighting this important global problem, and I hope that this work of condemnation and raising awareness, so that the voice of the most vulnerable will be heard everywhere in the world.

I also hope that in a few years from now we will meet again and that the situation will be at least a little better, and that there will be results of our work.

Thank you.

RELATED

