Voices of Sisters
Social Justice
Trafficking



Sisters discuss human trafficking as they broadcast from Radio Maria Yatsani Voice 99.3 FM in Lusaka, Zambia. Radio Maria is a private, civil nonprofit radio station across countries. Radio Maria in Zambia reaches the bordering countries of Malawi and Mozambique, with more than 1.5 million listeners. In Uganda and Tanzania, the sisters pay to use the station for public engagements. (Sr. Eucharia Madueke)



by Sr. Martina Anna Gwavava

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Editor's note: *In observance of the Feb. 8 feast day of Sr. Josephine Bakhita, the patron saint of human trafficking survivors, which is also the International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking, Global Sisters Report is publishing two special columns about a workshop held in Zambia by the Africa Faith and Justice Network to raise awareness among sisters about modern-day slavery and train them as advocates against it. (Read the other column here.) This is an example of efforts across the globe that sisters are undertaking to help stop human trafficking. Learn more at Talitha Kum; the U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking, and through Global Sisters Report's extensive coverage.*

In November 2021, I learned for the first time in my life that there is something called *advocacy*. That was when I attended a workshop on advocacy: "Religious Vocation, Church, Society, and Prophetic Witnessing" at the Salesian City of Hope Retreat Center, Makeni, Lusaka, Zambia.

I knew from the Bible that Jesus Christ promised "to send the Holy Spirit, the Advocate" who would remind the disciples all that Jesus did and taught (John 14:26). I also know that if one has a court case, then one needs a lawyer, called an advocate, to help one present their case in proper legal terms. I was not aware that I too can be an advocate. The question I might have had would be: in which circumstances and how?

The Zambia Association of Sisterhoods, or ZAS, invited sisters of our country — through the Major Religious Superiors — to attend that workshop on advocacy. We convened in Lusaka at the retreat center: 65 Sisters from 45 congregations coming from all the 10 provinces of Zambia. We had two presenters: Rev. Fr. Aniedi Okure, a Dominican priest based in Rome, and Sr. Eucharia Madueke, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur based in Washington, D.C.

Both are working with the Africa Faith and Justice Network, or AFJN, a nongovernmental organization. Africa Faith and Justice Network was born when missionaries returning to the United States noticed there were too many negative

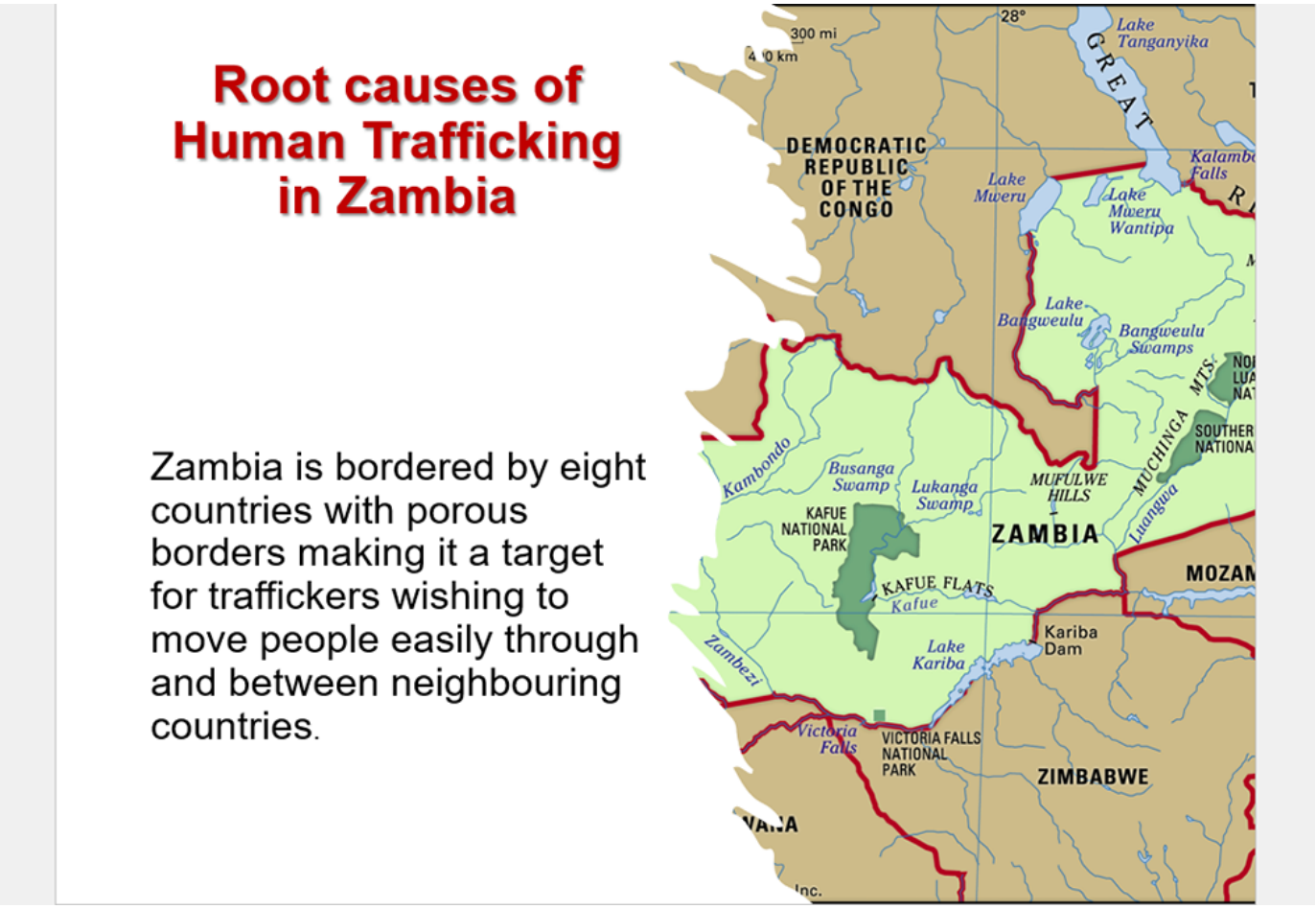
images of Africa in the media, and that U.S. policies related to Africa were administered unequally.

AFJN was inspired by the Gospel and Catholic social teaching to educate people about Africa, advocate for just relations with Africa, and work in partnership with African peoples to engage them in the struggle for justice, peace and integrity of creation — issues that impact Africa in general and Zambia in particular. This workshop focused on modern slavery, now under the new name *human trafficking*.

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We had a special guest, Martin Kapenda, the national director of Tehila Zambia, a child protection organization, to present actual research. He told us that human trafficking is real in Zambia and that Zambia is a source, transit and destination of human trafficking:

- *Source:* Zambian people, mainly children and women, are trafficked within the country for organized begging, domestic servitude, sexual exploitation and forced labor; or they are trafficked abroad for labor, sexual exploitation or organ removal;
- *Transit*: People are trafficked through Zambia from one country to another. Should Zambia allow such human trading within its borders? Who can speak for these victims? Who will listen to their cries of distress? Who can speak for the voiceless? How does one become aware of such a situation, what action to take, or whom to approach for assistance?
- *Destination:* People from other countries are trafficked into Zambia, especially from Asian countries, and exploited in the mining, construction and manufacturing industries, casinos and massage parlors.



One of the slides used during the advocacy workshop illustrates root causes of human trafficking in Zambia. Martin Kapenda of Tehila Zambia presented research to the sisters in attendance. (Courtesy of Martin Kapenda)

He explained that what makes it difficult to identify victims is that internal trafficking (from within the country) looks familiar. For example, young girls are recruited from rural communities and brought to urban households for the purpose of domestic servitude — a practice called "cultural fostering," but which is in fact providing cheap or free child labor on a mass scale to city-based households in the form of live-in domestic servants performing routine chores including childcare.

For practical work, the workshop leaders had organized a trip to the Intercity Bus Terminus in Lusaka, where all buses arrive from within Zambia and also from other neighboring countries like Malawi, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Democratic Republic of Congo. When the large group of nuns burst into the bus terminus, the bus conductors got very excited, hoping for passengers for their buses!



Sisters board a bus to take them to their advocacy sites in Lusaka. (Sr. Eucharia Madueke)

But we went to a small, obscure office staffed by two ladies, who told us real stories of people who returned home — luckily alive — after being taken by traffickers. I think that for some of us, this was the awakening point, because before that it had seemed rather far-fetched that a person could be stolen out of their own country.

In terms of action, the sisters prepared a press release to be aired on the Catholic Radio Maria Yatsani station in Lusaka on Nov. 16. The topic was "Protect the rights and dignity of our people from traffickers." It was presented by the Zambia Association of Sisterhoods president, Sr. Sylvia Kagulura of the Little Servants of Mary Immaculate. In her speech, she focused on how human trafficking has become a "highly organized efficient network of criminals that target vulnerable children and women from and within rural areas."

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She described the people involved in the intricate network, that are known by victims as family members or near acquaintances. Next, she reflected on the adverse impact of human trafficking on individuals, families and the Zambian nation. She concluded by appealing to the government to mobilize and establish mechanisms of creating awareness of this evil, and establish training programs for law enforcement and immigration officers.

She concluded: "We on our part are committed to tackling this evil that is affecting our country by organizing awareness seminars in our communities and in the institutions under our care, provide counseling to the rescued victims, and finding ways to reintegrate victims to be productive members of our society."

From this first encounter with advocacy, I understand that as a religious woman, my vocation in the church is to bring the love and justice of God into society. God sends his messengers, like prophets of old, to remind the people and leaders about the human dignity of everyone created in God's image.

But, as of old, speaking up against someone's profitable business, like human trafficking, is a risk. I believe we are those messengers to speak for and rescue the victims. Are we ready for combat? We have heard, we have seen; we will act and react. As for me, Martin Kapenda is based in the small town where I live, Mazabuka, and I am going to find out how I can incorporate his programs into my work at the Nchete House Women's Center.