News
Trafficking



Talitha Kum Bangladesh, one of the world's leading groups combating human trafficking, has organized a second series of seminars to fight the scourge in the country struggling to combat modern-day slavery. Participants in a seminar in the Diocese of Mymensingh are pictured Oct. 18, 2021. (OSV News/Stephan Uttom Rozario)

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Talitha Kum Bangladesh is empowering religious sisters and youth communities in the South Asian country to fight against human trafficking, child marriage and forced marriage with its new training program.

One of the world's leading groups combating human trafficking arranged its second national training program in Dhaka, the country's capital, Oct. 24-26, with 20 sisters from different congregations, 25 youth from Bangladesh's eight dioceses and a religious brother.

The first training program was held in 2023 with 19 sisters and 18 youth.

Sister Josephine Rozario of the Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate, coordinator of Talitha Kum Bangladesh, led both training programs.

"Bangladesh is the most vulnerable country in the world in terms of human trafficking, forced marriage, and child marriage ... all these crimes are more organized in Bangladesh due to poverty," Josephine told OSV News.

She said that poor girls and boys are easily recruited by traffickers due to a lack of funds for living, and parents also want to marry their girls as they can't afford to raise them. The youth are trafficked abroad or inside the country.

The network helps reach not only the religious but also youth communities in Bangladesh.

Talitha Kum Bangladesh is now working in schools, colleges, Catholic girls and boy's hostels, and other professional youth organizations. They are also seeking to expand their network, but are seeking more funds from donors to do so.

"For every work we need money. ... If Talitha Kum Bangladesh gets enough funds, we can easily reach more youth — even from the marginal territory of the country," Father Liton Gomes told OSV News.

"But we are trying our best to engage more youth and religious with the network and make a trafficking-free and well-aware Bangladesh," Gomes added.

In 2019, Gomes, a Holy Cross priest and secretary of the Justice and Peace Commission of the bishops' conference in Bangladesh, along with Josephine, started the Talitha Kum movement in the country, where the Christian minority makes up only 0.3% out of 175 million people.

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A U.S. Department of State 2023 report said the government of Bangladesh "does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so." The report suggested that the local authorities should increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes and apply adequate penalties for convicted traffickers.

According to a 2023 report by UNICEF — the United Nations agency advocating for the rights of children — approximately 51% of girls under 18 in Bangladesh were forced into early marriage.

"Bangladesh has the highest prevalence of child marriage in South Asia and is among the 10 countries worldwide with the highest levels. There are 41.6 million child brides in Bangladesh, 22.3 million of whom were married before the age of 15,"

the report said.

Bangladesh has passed laws against child marriage, setting the official marital age at 21.

Gomes said however that the law can't tackle child marriage and forced marriage. To do so, awareness should be built across the country.

Sangita Marak, a 21-year-old Catholic university student who joined the Talitha Kum Bangladesh training program in the Diocese of Sylhet, told OSV News that the training is very helpful "because I was just admitted to the university and I didn’t know about the kinds of trafficking."

"Talitha Kum Bangladesh finally taught me trafficking means not only being trafficked abroad — but that illegal migration to other places within the country is also trafficking. TKB also taught me how to tackle child marriage and forced marriage," another participant told OSV News.

After the second general assembly of Talitha Kum that took place May 18-24 outside Rome, an international network of women religious against human trafficking pledged to push for systemic change to root out modern slavery, and advocated for a commitment to a survivor-centered approach to accompanying trafficking victims, promising to also expand global partnerships.