

Interview to the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, in Particular Women and Children, Ms. Maria Grazia Giammarinaro

While visiting JCU, Ms Maria Grazia Giammarinaro who is the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, in Particular Women and Children, was interviewed by JCU student Federica Nappa under the supervision of JCU Professor Silvia Scarpa.

How did you get interested in human trafficking?

My work in the area of human trafficking started while being the Head of the Legislative Office and adviser to the Minister for Equal Opportunities in the period 1996 – 2001. The newly-established Ministry of Equal Opportunities acquired a mandate in this area and we started analyzing the reports of various NGOs working in the streets of many Italian cities on the shifting scenarios of prostitution and drug addiction. Many more women and girls appeared to be forced into prostitution. As time passed, the work with NGOs became closer, and the Minister of Equal opportunities at that time, Anna Finocchiaro, in cooperation the Ministry of Social Solidarity, Livia Turco, began to promote new legislation to raise awareness on the issue and take more concrete and effective action against this new phenomenon. That's how the Government arrived at the submission and subsequent adoption by the Parliament of the Italian Testo Unico sull'Immigrazione, including in particular its article 18, aimed at protecting victims of severe forms of exploitation. Women were working with women, in an effort to guarantee to victims of severe forms of exploitation the protection they needed. Moreover, the more research was conducted, the more challenging the problem appeared to be. Now, as UN Special Rapporteur on Human Trafficking, I have broadened the scope of my work to the international scenario.

Could you describe the scope of your mandate as a UN Special Rapporteur?

The scope is very wide, and includes reporting twice a year to the UN concerned bodies, the Human Rights Council in Geneva and the General Assembly in New York. Specifically, reports concern thematic aspects of the prevention of human trafficking and the protection of victims. Another important part of the work is the cooperation with NGOs and other relevant actors, including the private sector; this is paramount for tackling every ring of the supply chain and eventually eradicating the problem in situations of labor exploitation. Of course, also the role of Governments is fundamental for effectively fighting against human trafficking. Another interesting part of my job as UN Special Rapporteur is the conduct of country visits twice-a-year. It is usually a week-long visit to a country, where meetings with national and local authorities are held for the purpose of assessing the national system in place for protecting the victims of human trafficking. These meetings with various stakeholders including civil society organisations, are really important in order to understand how the phenomenon is perceived and what is effectively done locally, especially in federal states, such the United States of America. One of my last country visits was in fact held in the US.

Moreover, one should consider that human trafficking is a multidisciplinary issue that encompasses justice and judiciary systems, health care, education, etc., so every strategy aimed at protecting victims effectively should be tailored on the problem present in that specific region of the world or of a country. I then draft a report on every country visit and recommendations are attached to them; I also try to promote follow-ups on the implementation of these recommendations by State authorities. My mandate is particularly broad because it includes preventive action, cooperation with different parties, and the protection of the rights of victims. This is a challenging task because the financial resources are limited. However, I believe that the most powerful resource in the fight against any human rights violation is personal commitment. In

this sense, my work relies on a wide network of students, scholars and professionals, who are willing to cooperate and support my efforts.

Do you think that individuals can play an important role in contributing to solving this issue? If yes, how?

Everyone is urged and encouraged to join the discussion on human trafficking simply because we are all involved. Generally speaking, tackling human trafficking is about counteracting racist attitudes, that prevent people from seeing the reality of victims, who actually are exploited and extremely vulnerable. We are consumers, and we are all touched, or better stained, by human trafficking. The demand for cheap goods drives the supply for products made by individuals in human trafficking conditions. As consumers, we can promote good policies that can have an impact on what happens in the supply chains. Sadly, I have to admit that here in Italy, there are very few campaigns on what consumers are enabled to do. Furthermore, there are cases of trafficking for domestic servitude that have been detected thanks to the report of a neighbor, realizing that a domestic worker was starving, and showed clear signs of depression. There is always something an alert citizen can do to counteract trafficking.

Since the beginning of your mandate, have you seen progresses in finding solutions to the problem of human trafficking?

Absolutely. When we first started working on it, human trafficking was an unknown topic to many, but today, knowledge is widespread. Legislations are in place, human trafficking is criminalized, protection measures for victims were adopted by many States. Still, there are serious problems with some of these policies because, protective measures could be the source of further human rights violations. For example, in some countries the practice of so-called “close shelters” is in reality a form of administrative detention, which cannot be condoned and must be banned. The risk of ineffectiveness and further human rights violations is real, in particular for women and girls

trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation who, in many countries, have an ambiguous status and are not considered as real victims. However, on a long-term, information and awareness could really bring an end to gender inequality and discrimination based on multiple grounds, which are among the root causes of trafficking as a form of gender-based violence.