



XV SOUTH EAST ASIA MAJOR SUPERIORS CONGRESS  
SINGAPORE  
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For immediate release

***South East Asia Major Superiors agree to fight against human trafficking in the region***

Singapore, April 22, 2013 –The Major Superiors of 24 Religious Institutes in Southeast Asia have agreed to work to address human trafficking in their own contexts. This agreement came at the conclusion of the XV South East Asia Major Superiors (SEAMS) Congress 2013 on April 19, which was focussed on human trafficking. The concluding statement of the Congress developed by the Major Superiors states:

“Through the Congress, participants emerged with a strong conviction that we cannot continue to address human trafficking in our present piecemeal way. There is an urgent need for greater networking and collaboration.

Putting aside the tendency to label and stigmatize persons involved in human trafficking, we commit to upholding the dignity and uniqueness of each person in whom we encounter Christ for “whatsoever you do to the least of these my sisters and brothers, you do it to me”. (Matt 25:40, 45)”

The 33 delegates in this year’s Congress hailed from nine countries in the region –Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Micronesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Held in Singapore from April 15 to 19, 2013, the XV SEAMS Congress was organised by the Conference of Religious Major Superiors Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CRMS). The SEAMS Congress is held once every three years to encourage and enable networking and collaboration among the Religious in Southeast Asia. The various Conferences of Religious Major Superiors alternate as host and organiser.

“The decision to focus on human trafficking in this year’s Congress was unanimous as it has become a growing concern of the Church’s social mission,” said Fr Colin Tan SJ, XV SEAMS Congress Chairman and Regional Superior of the Jesuit Region of Malaysia-Singapore. “Human

trafficking is an issue that the Church takes very seriously. Blessed John Paul II called human trafficking 'a shocking offense against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights', and our new Pope Francis said in his Easter message that human trafficking is 'the most extensive form of slavery in this 21st century'.

"The CRMS had agreed in early 2011 that we needed to jointly work together to raise awareness of the serious issue of human trafficking. The Holy Spirit was surely with us because the modest anti-human trafficking project we embarked on in Advent that year became a spark that ignited a fire in us to learn more about this issue that affects so many men, women and children in our region."

The objectives of the five-day meeting were to provide a better understanding of the issues of human trafficking and increase awareness of existing initiatives, to initiate networking and collaboration among the participating countries, and to encourage the development of concrete action plans to counter human trafficking.

To achieve this, the Congress organising committee drew upon the experiences and expertise of religious orders and non-governmental organisations associated with religious orders. Speakers included Diana Carol of Women for Women in Kuching; Sr Agatha Ling SSFS; Sanjay Gathia, Advocacy & Training Officer (Asia & the Pacific), Franciscans International; Sr Mary Soh, Vice-Chairman of XV SEAMS Congress and Provincial Superior of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in Malaysia and Singapore; academic and researcher Dr Sallie Yea; Jolovan Wham, Executive Director at Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics (HOME); Braema Mathi, President of MARUAH; lawyer Azmeen Mioz; Daniel Lo, country manager of Coalition to Abolish Modern-Day Slavery in Asia (CAMSA); and Fr John Mansford Prior SVD, Asia-Pacific Secretary for Missiological Education and Research for the Divine Word Missionaries and a consultant to the Pontifical Council for Culture..

The Congress opened with an evening Mass at the Church of St Ignatius on April 15. Singapore Archbishop Nicholas Chia was the main celebrant, with Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, Apostolic Nuncio to Singapore; Melaka-Johor Bishop Paul Tan SJ; and Co-Adjutor Archbishop of Singapore William Goh concelebrating.

During the course of the next three days, the delegates were provided with an overview of the situation in Southeast Asia based on their contributions about their own contexts, a presentation of the situation in Singapore by local non-governmental organisations, analyses of

the sociological, legal and political perspectives of human trafficking, and a theological analysis of human trafficking in Southeast Asia. The delegates also visited the Geylang red light district to “walk the streets” to get a sense of the local context in Singapore. The experience of meeting the women walking the streets left a deep impression on the delegates and shocked some of them. The sharing and reflection upon the visit aided in the development of the concluding statement of the Congress on the final day and an action plan.

The action plan calls for enhancing collaboration among congregations, conferences and lay associations in Southeast Asia through the setting up of a common database; the appointment of a contact person from each Conference to follow up on progress from the Congress; encouraging lay associates of different congregations to work together more; and the sharing of resources. The action plan also lists steps to strengthen the work within congregations and conferences including sharing the knowledge gained from the Congress with the delegates’ congregations, Conferences, Bishops and diocesan clergy, raising awareness in schools, parishes and institutions run by religious, engaging men’s congregations to participate more actively in the fight against human trafficking, strengthening formation to include human rights, engaging non-governmental organisations, other religions and governments, and to exploring the feasibility of setting up shelters for trafficking persons.

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#### **Notes to the editor**

1. See Appendix I for list of Religious Institutes and countries.
2. The Conference of Religious Major Superiors Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei Anti-Human Trafficking Project was a common initiative to raise awareness of the serious issue of human trafficking. A set of five information brochures were produced and distributed through ministries of the Religious in the three countries. The first brochure provides an overview of human trafficking and was first distributed on October 30, 2011, Migrant Sunday. The other four brochures covered trafficking for forced labour, trafficking of children for exploitation, trafficking for sexual exploitation, and trafficking for organ removal. To view and download the brochures, go to <http://franciscans.sg/crms/>
3. See Appendix II for some information and resources on Human Trafficking
4. In Singapore, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary released a research report titled “Social Visits and Special Passes: A Situational Analysis of Migrant Women Exploited in Singapore’s Sex & Entertainment Industry” in February 2013. The report was written by Dr Sallie Yea. A copy of the report is available upon request. Please email Karen Goh at karen@katherosconsulting.com.

## Appendix I: XV South East Asia Major Superiors Congress 2013 delegates

<b>Religious Institutes</b>	<b>Countries represented</b>
CMF Claretian Fathers	Philippines
Congregation of Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, Philippines (OP)	Philippines
The Congregation of the Lovers of the Cross of Thu Thiem	Vietnam
CSsR	Singapore
Order of Friars Minor (OFM)	Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore
FDCC	Singapore
Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM)	Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore,
Good Shepherd Sisters (RGS)	Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand
JMJ	Indonesia
La Salle	Thailand
OC	Philippines
Order of Ursula of the Roman Union	Thailand
MC	Indonesia
Daughters of St Mary and Joseph (PMY)	Indonesia
Sisters of ORU of the Missions	Myanmar
Sisters of St. Francis Xavier	Myanmar
SSpS Servants of the HS	Philippines
Sisters of St Francis of Sarawak	Sarawak, Malaysia
Sisters of St Paul de Chartres (SPC)	Thailand
Sisters of Providence of Portieux	Vietnam
Society of Jesus (SJ)	Indonesia, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam
SVD	Indonesia

## Appendix II: Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is the fastest-growing crime in the world. An estimated 27 million people – men, women, children – have been made into slaves across the world, and every year, an estimated 800,000 people are internationally forced or sold into slavery.

The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children defines trafficking in persons as the act of “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat, use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, the abuse of power, a position of vulnerability, the giving or receiving of payments, or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include the exploitation of the sex service, other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs”. (Article 3, paragraph (a))

According to the International Labour Organization’s second global estimate of forced labour released on June 1, 2012, there are 20.9 million victims of modern slavery at any time.

- The ILO’s first estimate of forced labour, in 2005, was 12.3 million victims of forced labour and sex trafficking.
- The ILO estimates that 55 percent of forced labour victims are women and girls, as are 98 percent of sex trafficking victims.
- The ILO identified a higher percentage of sex trafficking victims, than in the 2005 Report.
- The Asia-Pacific region accounts for by far the largest number of forced labourers – 11.7 million or 56% of the global total.

For more information, see

- Summary of the ILO 2012 Global Estimate of Forced Labour - [http://www.ilo.org/sapfl/Informationresources/ILOPublications/WCMS\\_181953/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/sapfl/Informationresources/ILOPublications/WCMS_181953/lang-en/index.htm)
- US State Department Trafficking in Persons Report 2012 - <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2012/index.htm>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Global Report on Trafficking in Persons - <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/global-report-on-trafficking-in-persons.html>