

NEWS



The infringement of rights through sexual exploitation is discussed at Metropolis Women symposium

The **Metropolis Women International Network** organized last Friday (June 13th), for the second time in Barcelona, a symposium that posits the inequality of women as the center of debate. The event revolved around the topic of “Safety and Protection of the Victims of Sexual Exploitation: New Forms of Slavery and its Local Impact”, and counted on the participation of representatives from the METROPOLIS members of Abidjan, Amman, Bamako, Brussels, and the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, who discussed how to bring safety and protection to victims of sexual exploitation in urban areas.

The event was supported by Barcelona City Council, Barcelona Provincial Council, the Barcelona Metropolitan Area and the Government of Catalonia through the Catalan Institute for Women. The conference was opened with a few words of welcome and support from the METROPOLIS president, Mr. Jean-Paul Huchon. The audience, composed of almost 200 people, also counted on the participation of representatives of the United Nations, local civil society organizations and authorities from the USA.

“Our responsibility as administrations, organizations, entities, and, above all, as citizens is to put all of our efforts and capabilities into fighting what is known as 21st century slavery,” said Frangina Vila, Councillor for Women and Civil Rights of the City of Barcelona and President of the Metropolis Women International Network. “We must be capable of generating public debate about how to respond to the infringement of the basic rights that the victims of sexual exploitation suffer from” she added.

The purpose of the symposium was to contextualize the issue of women and girls trafficking internationally and within countries, and to discuss ways to protect victims in our cities with different stakeholders that work at the local level in various countries.

Sexual exploitation,
in the world

Women and girls are
the main victims of
sexual exploitation,
the most profitable
criminal activity
after arms and drug
trafficking.

The UN Global
Report on
Trafficking in
Persons reported
55,000 victims in
2012. However, this
is just the tip of the
iceberg, as the
figure only refers to
official data.

The event enabled a discussion of the topic from different approaches, both from a global perspective and a more local, municipal and metropolitan dimension. This wealth of viewpoints made it possible to conclude that while “90% of cases of sexual exploitation are linked to international organizations” (Xavier Cortès), “trafficking does not have to be international but is also commonplace within a country” (Mark Mineo).

The great complexity that the fight against sexual exploitation represents was present during the different roundtable discussions, which focused among other aspects on the “slowness of police and judicial institutions to adapt to the immense agility and capacity for movement of criminal structures.” (Ricardo Salas) and, as it is a global phenomenon, the “need to create a comprehensive law that prevents a heterogeneous approach to the concepts involved” (Adriana Ribas).

Parallel to the discussion, the event included a solidarity coffee break provided by the Catalan Association for Integration and Human Development (ACIDH), an organization which works to improve the quality of life of the intellectually impaired by providing them with comprehensive care.

The symposium allowed the Metropolis Women International Network to offer menus to ACIDH’s four care homes in Barcelona and the “Support Autonomy at Home” project, which involves adapting houses to the conditions of the intellectually impaired.

Sexual violence must be cut off at the bud by focusing on the

situations of extreme vulnerability of girls and boys in different societies in order to prevent them falling into criminal networks.

(Photo by Enric)

It is necessary to center the debate from the victim’s viewpoint, without criminalizing her.

More resources are needed at both the economic and legal levels to identify and care for victims.