

The Light Has Been Sent to You, To Release You from Bondage and Give You Life

Sr. Yukie Nogami ACI
Talitha Kum Japan Steering Committee Member



The word “human trafficking” reminds me of the women who came to Japan to work in 1980’s. I wonder how those women are doing now. I remember how far away from reality the work that they had dreamed doing in Japan! They were treated as animals or objects in the sex industry, like modern day slaves. And in the face of the kind of slavery that still lurks in our society in a different form today, I say to each one of us, “Open your eyes and see. Arise (Talitha kum) and walk!”

Talitha Kum Japan is sincerely tackling the Foreign Technical Intern Trainee System a revised name from its former Trainee System that has started after the 1989 revision of the Immigration Control Act took effect in June 1990. I recall various consultations received by our office at that time from trainees and even employers who sought advices about their contracts. Our untiring actions to work with those whose lives are threatened and to eliminate human-rights violation caused by the system have been path to see the reality of the victims, protect their lives, and restore their rights. Even now, there are still serious human-rights abuses and disregard of life against technical interns. However, thanks to the continuous appeals and efforts by advocacy groups such as Solidarity Network with Migrants, Japan this November an expert panel will be launched in order to re-examine and reform the system drastically.

As the Word of God “Talitha Kum” (Mk. 5:41) raised up a girl who was trapped in death I would like us to listen to the word, “Talitha Kum” as if it is being addressed to each of us.
“And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14).

Christmas when the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us is soon approaching. For Christmas to come, God has asked Mary’s Fiat – “May it be done to me according to your word.”

What does God ask of me this Christmas? Can I respond to God’s request with Fiat?

I hope that the Word of the Lord will dwell in each one of us that we will reach out to those whose dignity as human beings have been trampled upon, and that we will be able to respond with Fiat.

For each and every one to regain the fullness of human life, to end systemic violation of human rights, and to remain the light of the world and the salt of the earth,

Lord, come quickly!



Talitha Kum Japan Online Seminar in Autumn 2022

“Cooperate to Support Technical Intern Trainees Toward the Abolition of the System”

Sr. Atsuko Kano AASC
Talitha Kum Japan Steering Committee Member

Talitha Kum Japan On-line Seminar was held on October 1 with more than 300 participants. At the beginning, Sr. Shizue Hirota, MMB explained how the participants' desire to know more about Technical Intern Trainee System led to this seminar. She emphasized the importance of being interested to know before one could inform people about the Technical Intern Trainee System and this will lead to action. This seminar started with a prayer, hoping that everyone would be connected to this desire and able to walk together.

The first lecture was given by Ms. Naoko Sunai, Associate Professor of Tokyo Gakugei University, with the title “Further Collaboration of Assistance~ Report from Vietnamese Technical Intern Trainees' Covid-19 Hotline”. Knowing that the number of Vietnamese who were reduced to poverty due to Corona disaster has been increasing since around February 2020, the “One Cup of Love Rice Project” as food support was started in April of the same year. Majority of beneficiaries were Vietnamese, and in term of resident status, about 70% were technical intern trainees. Along with this food support project, the Vietnamese Technical Intern Trainees' Covid-19 Hotline started with the objective of solving labor issues and livelihood problems. It has been expanded to various areas including Hokkaido, Gifu, Hiroshima, Osaka and Kita-Kyushu. There are coordination and systematic operation during the consultations. Lawyers, labor unions and support organization personnel, specialists, interpreters, note-takers, and secretariat staffs cooperate as actors within the Hotline. She also explained the support for applying to the Organization for Technical Intern Training (OTIT), and reported various concrete cases.



Then Sr. Doan Thi Diem Huong SFMA testified as a supporter, sharing her experience of negotiating with the company employers to protect the rights of a Vietnamese whose wage was unpaid. Although being threatened, they managed to solve the matter with the cooperation of a labor union.

After that, a technical intern trainee herself testified providing insights into the circumstances leading up to her pregnancy and childbirth. Now, back in Japan and working as a technical intern again, she said, “Even if you are pressured, calm down and consult someone. Don’t abort!”

Another lecture was shared by Mr. Ippei Torii (Secretary General of the Solidarity Network with Migrants, Japan), with the title “Toward the Abolition of the Technical Intern Trainee System”. He explained using a vast volume of statistical data that there are foreigners throughout Japan who are engaged in various types of work in various industries under the name of technical intern trainees. He posed questions to the participants “Can one really learn skills by working as a technical trainee? Isn’t it merely an acceptance system of workers in reality?”

Even though employment contracts exist, the principle of equality between workers and managements is not applied. Problems of unpaid salary, low wages and work-related accidents have occurred. Moreover, violence and forced repatriation arise. The employment contract in Japan, a democratic country, ought to be a system where wages are paid as compensation for labor. However, trainees are told: “Pregnancy and child-birth are not allowed. You are fired”.

He argued that this problem could not be solved by superficial reform or minor modifications. He insisted that the technical intern system should be abolished and a new system for accepting migrant workers must be created. I felt that this was a big step forward.

We aim to walk together in a multicultural society. It is time to recognize the issue of labor shortage. Rather than doing investigation and denouncing the inadequacies of the system, the reality is that there is a labor shortage. It is time to consider what is needed to solve it and take action.



In closing, Bp. Michiaki Yamanouchi, chairperson of the Catholic Commission of Japan for Migrants, Refugees and People on the Move (J-CaRM), spoke about his own experiences and appealed that now is the time to examine how to accept migrant workers and how the system should be. It is a path for Japanese and foreigners to walk together. He encouraged everyone to pray and take concrete actions. As an image of this, he showed a large picture of the statue of a boat with many people on it (installed in the Vatican St. Peter’s Square on Refugee Migrant Workers’ Day in 2019). He closed the seminar by praying for all participants to walk together toward the future aiming for a symbiotic cultural society.

Talitha Kum Asia Regional Conference

Sr. Shizue Hirota, MMB
Chairperson of Talitha Kum Japan Steering Committee

The 4th Regional conference of Talitha Kum Asia under the theme “Casting the Nets as Network in Asia to End Trafficking in Persons” was held from 22-25 August 2022 at the Pastoral Training Center of the Archdiocese of Bangkok, Thailand. There were 63 participants from 13 national members in Asia: Bangladesh, Cambodia, East Timor, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Pakistan (online), Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam, including the Talitha Kum International Coordinators from Rome. Kyohei Kobayashi, Youth Ambassador, Sr. Nagase, Clarita Sanchez, and Hirota participated from Japan.

The objectives of this Conference were:

- 1) To deepen the understanding of Human Trafficking realities in the Asian context.
- 2) To strengthen Talitha Kum’s networking in Asia and collaboration with Interfaith groups and other organizations in anti-trafficking.
- 3) To assess the Talitha Kum Priorities 2020-2025 and the implementation of Talitha Kum’s Call to Action.
- 4) To learn and provide opportunities for cross-learning of practices and experiences among participants.
- 5) To strengthen the implementation of a regional hub team focusing on formation, communication, prevention, networking, and advocacy.
- 6) To increase young people’s commitment to Talitha Kum’s mission and vision in anti-trafficking.



On the first day of the conference, Talitha Kum of each country shared issues and various actions. Some of the common challenges are online sexual exploitation of children, sexual labor exploitations, and unsafe migration. The conference reiterated the key target groups: women, girls and children, migrant workers, students and teachers, and community leaders. Our strengths are TK core groups, collaboration with the Church and non-Church partners, actions on prevention and protection, and advocacy. We also identified some limitations caused by COVID-19 restrictions, no full-time TK personnel in many countries, the different backgrounds of TK in other countries, the increasing number of migrant workers, and internally displaced persons in some countries. While collaboration with Church partners in many countries has been considered a strength, it is still challenging in some countries.

The Youth Ambassadors from Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam have also joined the conference. Their presence brought animation and joy to the whole meeting.



On the second day, the Buddhist, Muslim, and Catholic women shared their work. The key messages from the panelists were the importance of networking, a sense of compassion, the role of family, human development, and dignity, which are universal ethical values. The sharing enabled us to see the significance of interfaith collaboration, which does not focus on doctrinal differences but humanity. The participants also had the opportunities to experience activities conducted by (1) Baan Home Hug on its works with orphans, (2) Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres on the project of economy sufficiency and empowerment of women, and (3) Good Shepherd Sisters through its project of local community empowerment for livelihood. Stella Maris of Chantaburi Diocese and Good Shepherd Sisters' Fountain of Life Center in Pattaya shared the survivors' stories. The second day ended with sharing the experience of the youth ambassadors regarding the awareness of human trafficking with over 60 seminarians of the Lux Mundi Seminary.

From the presentation by Sr. Gabriella Bottani, Talitha Kum International Coordinator, the Conference identified guidelines for our Call to Action as follows:

1. Ensuring access to justice and long-term state-supported psychosocial and health assistance.
2. Empowering women and girls as well as their families and communities.
3. Supporting safe and legal migration pathways, including in cases of forced displacement.
4. Promoting an economy of care and solidarity.

Since September 1st, 2022, Sr. Abby Avelino, MM, has been the new International Coordinator of Talitha Kum. Sr. Avelino is taking over after Sr. Gabriella Bottani, SMC, who has been leading Talitha Kum since 2014 and nurturing its development. Sr. Abby has served in Japan and lately as Talitha Kum Asia coordinator. Let us continue our journey to end Human Trafficking with renewed passion in gratitude to Sr. Abby for her leadership.



It is time to abolish the Technical Intern Training Program and establish a legitimate system for accepting foreign workers!

Motoko Yamagishi
J-CaRM Expert Member

Since the Japanese government announced its policy to utilize foreign workers to fill in the gaps of labor shortage due to aging Japanese society, the number of foreign workers has increased every year. Last year, the number was 1,720,000 among which 320,000 were trainees under the Technical Intern Training Program (as of June 2022). The Program supposedly aims at skill transfer to developing nations, but in reality it has become the supply source of cheaper labor forces that support Japanese society with a scarce labor force. And various human rights violations occur within the Program. Therefore, this Program has been criticized and requested to change by the US Department of State, the United Nations Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and other international communities for a long time.

Although being criticized as hotbed of human trafficking, the Japanese government has identified not a single person as a victim of human trafficking. Amid such circumstances, it was epoch-making that four technical trainees were identified as victims of human trafficking for the first time, but it is a merely small fraction of the real figure.

On the other hand, the Japanese government, the ruling party, and the business world are actively discussing the prospect of the Technical Intern Training Program and a new acceptance system for foreign workers. The former Minister of Justice, Yoshihisa Furukawa said in his New Year's Reflection this year, "Now is the time to review the Technical Intern Training Program and the Specified Skilled Worker Visa. I would like to review them first and foremost this year. It is necessary to confront the opinion and suggestions that the Program's real intention differs from what was supposedly said. According to the press coverage, an expert panel to examine the Program will be launched by the end of this year, and a legislative bill will be submitted to the Diet next year.

What we Catholics desire is a system to accept foreign workers in which the human rights and dignity of foreigners are guaranteed as much as Japanese workers. To that end, it is necessary to establish a system in which foreigners can choose to settle down in Japan, having the freedom to change jobs and marry. This year from May to June, the Nationwide Caravan to Stop Technical Intern Training Program was carried out. J-CaRM joined this Caravan with other civil organizations. We approach a critical stage to change the Program drastically. Let's raise voices together!



Voice of the Youth An Inspiring and Empowering Experience

Kyohei Kobayashi
Talitha Kum Japan Youth Ambassador,



I am Kyo, one of the Talitha Kum Japan Youth Ambassadors and I am one of the fortunate ones to participate in the Talitha Kum Asia Regional Conference that was held in Bangkok, Thailand last August 22 - 26, 2022 with the theme of “Casting the Nets as Network in Asia to End Human Trafficking in Persons.” There were more than 50 participants of religious women, lay missionaries and youth from 14 different Asian countries.

Although I was the only man participant among the many blessed women at the conference, it did not bother me at all. In fact, I felt more at home because of the motherly love of the Sisters and the lay missionaries. As the famous saying goes, “Mothers know best” and surely they know what is best for the children of God. That is to care, to heal, to empower and above all, to love especially people who are suffering, voiceless and helpless.

It is beyond words to express how grateful I am for this opportunity and experience. Not only have I learned a lot but I have found new friendships, a new family, and a new purpose in life. It was a real eye-opening experience for me to see the reality and the suffering of many people in different Asian countries. I was blinded by the crowd of people wearing business suits and school uniforms in the city of Tokyo for a while. Now I see a reality where children don't even have the freedom to go to school.

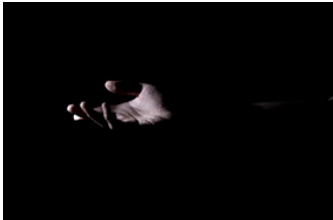
As I listened to each country’s report about the cases of human trafficking and many sad realities that are happening in their own country, what struck me on the other hand was the wonderful deeds that these people have done to help and protect the victims. The generosity and the love that each one is giving in every mission they do. The hope that they have given to this world. Moreover, the joy that I have felt from each of them doing selfless service to humanity. Finally, being able to meet these people, learn from them, pray with them, laugh with them and dream with them is what made this experience inspiring and empowering.



International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking Online Prayer Marathon on February 8, 2023

This coming February 8th is the “International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking”, and the Feast of St. Josephine Bakhita, and the Online Prayer Marathon by Talitha Kum International will be held on this day. The title is “Journeying in Dignity”. Videos created by Talitha Kum youth ambassadors from around the world will be broadcasted online one after another as a prayer pilgrimage. We will announce later detailed information on the exact time when the video made by the Japanese youth will come out during the Prayer Marathon. So, please watch.

“Let us journey together with migrant people, as pilgrims of human dignity, pilgrims of hope. This pilgrimage allows us to encounter God, ourselves, and others, whom we recognize as our brothers and sisters. Let us start our journey keeping in our hearts the words of the prophet Micah, reminding us what essential in the spiritual journey (Mic 6:8); “only to do right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with our God”(Extracts from Vigil Prayer 2023).



1st Station: Encountering people marked by the painful reality of exploitation and human trafficking.

2nd Station: Building bridges between victims and survivors of human trafficking and people committed to end human trafficking.

3rd Station: Encountering one another to establish universal fraternity and social friendship.

We thank you for your generous financial support for Talitha Kum Japan.
The donation will be used to provide support for victims of human trafficking for
shelter expenses, emergency living expenses, legal casework,
translation/interpretation expenses, newsletter, seminars, and workshops for the
prevention of trafficking in persons.

~Japan Post Bank money transfer form is available at the J-CaRM Secretariat office~
Postal # 00110-8-560351

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