

Carrying on the Legacy of Pope Francis

Motoko Yamagishi
Talitha Kum Steering Committee Member

Pope Francis, who passed away in April 2025, consistently described human trafficking as “a raw wound of modern society” and “a brutal tragedy.” He expressed deep compassion for victims, especially those in vulnerable situations. Through his messages and at international conferences, he repeatedly called for global cooperation to confront the scourge of human trafficking, which impacts people across the world.

“Each year, thousands of innocent men, women, and children are victims of exploitative labor and sexual abuse, and of organ trafficking, and it seems that we have become so accustomed to this as to consider it a normal thing. This is deplorable; it is cruel; it is criminal! I wish to remind everyone of the duty to combat this abhorrent plague, a form of modern slavery.” (*Pope Francis, Angelus, July 30, 2017*)



“We cannot become distracted: we are all called to leave behind any form of hypocrisy, facing the reality that we are part of the problem.” (*Pope Francis, Video Message to the Participants in the International Forum on Modern Slavery, May 7, 2018*)

In 2019, under Pope Francis’ leadership, the Catholic Church released the *Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking*, a document grounded in years of lived experience and advocacy.

These orientations define the contemporary landscape of human trafficking and offer concrete strategies to combat it, especially through the efforts of the Church. The document addresses the commodification and exploitation of human beings, the roles of business and migration, and the ethical implications for society. It also highlights the difficulties victims face when reintegrating into their communities and the critical support the Church can provide. Above all, it underscores that tackling human trafficking is a shared responsibility that requires the collaboration of all people.

At the time, I was involved in preparing the provisional Japanese translation commissioned by the Catholic Commission of Japan for Migrants, Refugees, and People on the Move.

Talitha Kum Japan remains committed to the eradication of human trafficking, continuing the legacy and final appeals of Pope Francis. With renewed dedication, we seek to reexamine and apply the Pastoral Orientation in our work.

Talitha Kum Japan Online Seminar 2025
**“Trafficking in Persons in Southeast Asia and
the Sexual and Economic Exploitation of Young People in Japan”**

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

On Saturday, June 7, we had an online lecture on the above topic from Ms. Yuriko Saito, Visiting Professor at Daito Bunka University and Board Member of the General Incorporated Association “Colabo.” The 70-minute presentation, using PowerPoint, covered a wide range of topics, including the challenges of human trafficking in Japan during the 1980s and 1990s, recent issues such as cyber fraud in Southeast Asia, child pornography via the internet, organ trafficking, and child soldiers, as well as the challenges of sexual and economic exploitation targeting young people in Japan. Based on her own research and experiences, she delivered a concrete and vivid appeal that resonated deeply with the participants.

From Southeast Asia to Japan, and from Japan to Southeast Asia

In the 1990s, there were many cases in Japan where women were deceived into illegally entering the country from Thailand and forced into prostitution without pay to repay huge debts, leading to incidents and arrests. Ms. Saito supported women who were victims of human trafficking, lived in Thailand for nearly 10 years, and worked as a researcher and consultant for international NGOs and international organizations involved in social welfare programs. As part of her research on human trafficking, the records of interviews with over 100 victims are highly regarded as valuable documentation.

The reality of human trafficking in the 21st century has become even more diverse, with the spread of the internet, and its content, scope, and complexity have also increased. In February this year, a Japanese high school student was deceived by online information and forced to participate in a cyber fraud scheme in the lawless border region between Thailand and Myanmar—an incident that remains fresh in our memories. Additionally, there is the harrowing reality of fishermen from Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia who are confined on human rights-abusing fishing vessels and forced into slave labor. It is an undeniable fact that the fish they catch in such harsh working conditions, where starvation is a constant threat, are consumed by us living in Japan. Furthermore, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, cyber sex trafficking targeting poor children in impoverished countries has surged. A system has been established where children are forced into sexual acts and filmed, with the footage sold cheaply to consumers in

industrialized nations. I am inspired by the existence of people who are taking action to address this issue, recognizing the immense physical and emotional trauma suffered by the victimized children, and working to restore humanity and bring about social transformation on a global scale.

Sexual and economic exploitation of young people in Japan: Activities of “Colabo”

“Colabo” is an organization that supports girls facing difficulties who cannot ask for help, aiming to create a society where they are not trapped in violence, and providing them with basic necessities and meaningful relationships. However, the organization is now facing violent attacks and has been forced to relocate its activities from a location in Shinjuku, where many of the girls are based. Those responsible for spreading defamatory messages online and launching attacks that threaten the lives of the people of the Organization are anti-social forces profiting enormously from the sex industry. Many of these girls are victims of domestic violence, have no reliable adults or trusted friends, lack a stable place to live, and face severe economic hardship. They desperately need the basic conditions necessary to live a dignified and secure life. Regarding her involvement with Colabo, where Ms. Saito serves as a board member, she told us about her trip to Thailand with such girls, who were invited with the simple and kind words, “Let’s eat.” From the story of a girl who said, “I realized that eating makes me feel stronger,” I understood the importance of a safe and humanizing environment where these girls could accept others’ kindness as a healing journey from their bruised past. Thank you for the work of “Colabo”.

ご支援のお願い Colabo

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Colaboホームページ
<https://colabo-official.net/support/>

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Event Report “Raise Your Voice !”

Rikako Nishikawa
Talitha Kum Japan Youth Ambassador

On February 23, 2025, we held the event “Raise Your Voice !” at the Infant Jesus Sisters (Nicolas Barré), hosted by the Talitha Kum Japan Youth Ambassador (TKYA). We were delighted to welcome about 30 participants. We would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to everyone who attended and to all those who supported the event.

As the title suggests, the central theme of this event was raising our voices. Human trafficking is a deeply serious issue, yet it often remains invisible in our daily lives. Many tend to think of it as something distant or unrelated to them. That is precisely why raising awareness is such an important first step toward addressing the problem.

This event aimed to inform more people about the current situation of human trafficking and the efforts being made to combat it. We hoped it would serve as a space where people of all ages could learn, reflect, share, and be inspired to take action together.

Here is a brief overview of the day’s program:

1•Registration & Opening Prayer

2•Introduction of the Talitha Kum Japan Youth Ambassador

We began by introducing ourselves and invited participants to share their expectations for the event.

3•Introduction to Talitha Kum

We spoke about the international network of Talitha Kum, the origin of its name, our role as TKYA, and the activities we’ve been involved in.

4•Lunch Break

5•Main Session: Understanding Human Trafficking

This session focused on the definition of human trafficking, shared real-life cases, and highlighted the reality of trafficking occurring in Japan.

6•Video Message from Survivor

Through our connection with the Philippine Survivor Network, we were honored to share a powerful interview with a survivor. They spoke of their personal experiences, the journey toward healing, and their message to society.

7•Workshop

In small groups, participants freely discussed their thoughts and reactions. During the workshop, they created posters reflecting what they had learned and felt—through drawings, words, or any form of expression. Each group’s poster revealed their unique perspective and collaborative spirit, which was deeply inspiring.

8•Holy Mass & Closing Prayer

After the event, we received many warm and thoughtful comments from participants. Here are just a few:

“The information provided in that event was very enlightening, clear and well presented. I appreciated the sharing of ‘cases’ and especially the touching testimony of the Filipina youth. The part [what makes it a



human trafficking case] helped me to know more about human trafficking that is going on and to grasp more the depth of that social problem. It gave me encouragement to continue “raising my voice” to fight that terrible reality. The event was worth attending, interesting and the atmosphere was good! Thank you to the team that prepared it so well and did a very good animation.”

“This event helped me realize once again just how powerful each individual’s voice can be. During the workshop, we exchanged so many ideas and discussed what we can do starting today.”

“One of the most significant learnings was discovering the broader terminology for human trafficking (人身売買→人身取引), of which I was previously unaware. By the way, it was really good that the youth ambassador was with us as a facilitator during the group sharing session. I just hope maybe we could have a little longer time to share next time. It was deeply meaningful to spend time with friends who are collectively taking steps to create change and share hope.”

This was my very first time organizing an event from start to finish. While the process of planning and execution was not without its challenges, working together with my fellow Youth Ambassadors—sharing ideas and supporting one another toward a common goal—was incredibly rewarding.



Most of all, I was grateful that participants came to understand our sincere commitment to addressing the issue of human trafficking. The thoughtful conversations and the intensity in everyone’s eyes throughout the day confirmed that this event truly mattered.

One thing I strongly felt was the importance of not just sharing information, but creating a space where people can think, feel, and engage together. Human trafficking is a complex and overwhelming issue, and no one can tackle it alone. That’s why we must unite, support one another, and raise our voices together.

We are blessed to already be united through God, through His teachings and prayer. This spiritual bond is a profound source of strength and hope as we face these challenges. With the lessons we’ve learned from this event, we hope to continue creating spaces where people can share their insights, stories, and hopes. May our activities help spark connections that grow into movements—one voice at a time.



Support Services for Vietnamese Migrants: Talitha Kum Japan's Hotline and Shelter Initiatives

Motoko Yamagishi
Talitha Kum Japan Steering Committee Member

In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic spread, the Catholic Commission of Japan for Migrants, Refugees and People on the Move (J-CaRM), in cooperation with the Network for the Rights of Technical Intern Trainees, launched *the Vietnamese Technical Intern Hotline* to provide urgent consultations for Vietnamese workers facing poverty and labor issues.

Starting in 2021, the hotline was renamed the *Labor and Life Hotline*, a joint effort with the Jesuit Social Center and the Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan. The hotline offers online consultation services from eight locations across Japan – Sapporo, Sendai, Ibaraki, Tokyo, Gifu, Osaka, Fukuyama, and Kitakyushu – responding to urgent calls from technical intern trainees suffering from human rights violations and labor exploitation, such as low wages, excessive working hours, and abuse. As of May 2025, 28 hotline sessions have been held, with over 600 consultations recorded.

In the past, some trainees have faced sudden dismissal or forced deportation due to pregnancy, childbirth, or workplace disputes, often requiring emergency shelter. In such cases, we have reached out to religious congregations listed under Talitha Kum Japan to provide safe refuge.

One such case is Ms. G, who had been employed at an auto factory. After being repeatedly reassigned to different jobs, she was suddenly dismissed and nearly deported at the beginning of this year. She has now been sheltered for over four months at a convent affiliated with Talitha Kum. Thanks to labor union negotiations, she is on track to be reemployed at a branch office of her former company.

Another case involves Ms. S, who worked at a nursing facility. She was sheltered this May after facing forced deportation following a misunderstanding related to a conflict with a co-worker. The convent generously took her in, offering a safe and welcoming environment.

Both women have been integrated into the daily life of the convent community—sharing meals, helping with chores, learning Japanese, and enjoying conversations with the sisters.

The sisters warmly welcomed them with words like, “Thank you for coming to us.” Initially, the women were so shaken by their experiences that they could not sleep at night. But now, they have regained their strength and smiles.



The kindness and patience of the sisters have been a source of healing. “It’s okay if the negotiations take time”, they told the women. “Take your time. We are also grateful for the help and support you’ve given us.”

This compassionate example of co-living and mutual support is a true expression of Talitha Kum’s mission. I sincerely hope such practices will continue to grow and spread through the efforts of the network.

Youth Voice

Walking as ambassadors of hope: A call from Rome

Crystal Eileen
Talitha Kum Japan Youth Ambassador

From February 1st to 8th, 2025, youth from around the world gathered in Rome for the International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking, during the Jubilee Year of Hope. Representing Talitha Kum Japan, I had the privilege of joining this powerful convergence of young people united in a common mission: to end human trafficking.

Throughout the week, we exchanged practices, strategies, and creative methods to raise awareness in our home countries. What stood out most was the shared determination among participants. Despite coming from different continents and contexts, there was a deep sense of unity in purpose and hope.

One of the most moving moments was meeting a survivor who spoke with quiet strength and unwavering resilience. With honesty and courage, they shared not only their hardships, but also their determination to be the change they wish to see. Their strength and clarity reminded us of the importance of walking together in this mission, guided by the voices of those most affected. That encounter remains in my heart, and I hope it can inspire others too—to listen, to act, and to never look away.

A special blessing came through an audience with Pope Francis. His message was one of strength and clarity: “We must not tolerate the shameful exploitation of so many of our sisters and brothers... I encourage you to continue your work, making victims and survivors your primary concern... That is what it means to be ambassadors of hope.” His words became a source of renewed commitment for all of us.

By the end of our journey, we co-authored a unified “Call to Action” —a document outlining concrete steps for prayer, education, rehabilitation, and collaboration. It affirms our global commitment to be Ambassadors of Hope, journeying together in the Jubilee Year and beyond. This Rome experience was not just a gathering—it was a commissioning.

Let us continue walking, sharing, and raising our voices, so that the light of human dignity never dims.



Japanese Translation of *Call to Action*



We are pleased to once again present the Japanese translation of the official document *Call to Action* by Talitha Kum International.

Originally published in 2021, this document is based on the Final Declaration adopted in celebration of the 10th anniversary of Talitha Kum. It outlines Talitha Kum's four main goals and provides specific guidelines for action toward achieving them.

The purpose of this document is to strengthen the network of cooperation rooted in a spirituality of solidarity and activism. It offers practical guidance on how to stand in close accompaniment with those affected by human trafficking.



You can read the full text by scanning the QR code on the right or by visiting the following URL:
<https://x.gd/azQpj>.

We are also happy to provide a free printed copy of the booklet upon request. If you would like one, please contact us at the new email address below.

New E-mail Address of Talitha Kum Japan

Please note that our email address has changed. Feel free to contact us at our new address:

japantalithakum@gmail.com

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~
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