

## **22<sup>nd</sup> Alliance against Trafficking in Persons conference**

### **Suamhirs Piraino-Guzman**

#### **Talking Points**

- My name is Suamhirs Piraino-Guzman, I'm a licensed behavioral psychologist and specialized in trauma-informed care to survivors of contemporary forms of slavery and human trafficking. I am, a survivor of child sexual exploitation and trafficking. I am also a member of the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund for on Contemporary Forms of Slavery.
- I grew up with trauma and was shaped by trauma, at the age of 9 my father left leaving my mother in a wheelchair and I with an eye half cut open. At the age of 12 I experienced my first sexual assault while selling articles door by door, on August 10, 1999 I knocked on the wrong door. At the age of 14 I was taken from my home country Honduras and brought to San Diego, California where for 6 months I experience over 197 sexual assaults.
- On July 27, 2004, 7 months after I went missing, the police found me and one girl from China and one girl from Colombia. After being taken out of my trafficking situation, I was placed in the case of the State of California and received federal and state funded victim services. Good intentioned people did not know what to do with me, an immigrant child, who did not speak English, did not have any family in the USA and had experience levels of trauma the system has yet capable to support.
- I received many services, some were` helpful, some were difficult, some took my autonomy, most didn't ask me what "I needed?" and some didn't realize the full extent of the trauma I had experienced. In 2004, just 4 years after the passing of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, I was the first underage boy that experience a severe form of human trafficking and exploitation. This meant that the system was learning from my experience and realized the power of survivor's voice in setting up systems of care.
- While in services, I received medical, dental, vision, housing, case management, reunification, psychosocial services, immigration status and a pathway to citizenship.
- Participating states, honorable colleagues; state funded services hold the key to wellbeing, justice, recovery, reintegration and prevents future victimization.
- The key to a full, healthy recovery and reintegration is holistic assistance, provided immediately after the identification of the exploitation/human trafficking case, and throughout the years. Cooperation between case managers, child protection agencies, case lawyers, judges, career coaches, psychologists and youth support groups is essential for:
  - Preventing re-traumatization of the survivor during the criminal justice process
  - Healing the physical and psychological sequelae of trauma
  - Preventing self-harming behaviours and facilitating healthy social relations
  - Preventing school drop-out, unemployment and homelessness / Facilitating academic and social success
  - Obtaining justice in a dignified manner and in full respect to the rights of the survivor
- Holistic assistance needs to be available, accessible and appropriate to every survivor of exploitation, slavery and/or human trafficking. Professionals involved in the delivery of assistance need to coordinate not only between themselves, but they also need to work in full synergy with the survivor. We need to ensure the inclusion of survivors in every step of the

decision-making processes, while hearing their voices and respecting their agency. This approach has the potential to empower every survivor to be the agent of their recovery and to convey this agency to other survivors thus building up a bottom-up recovery model.

- In many regions of the world (including Europe) people who survive exploitation, slavery and/or human trafficking still lack access to tailored made programs of recovery and reintegration. Whatever assistance is being made available to them, it is still being fragmented and provided by different institutions, agencies and organizations, which often do not coordinate case management.
- I would like to stress that conflict and war create the conditions that put people, especially children at higher risk of exploitation, slavery and/or human trafficking. Children across war thorn countries such as Syria, Yemen, Palestine, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Nigeria, South Sudan, and many others are currently experiencing high levels of anxiety, depression, PTSD, death and other adverse childhood experiences that put children at higher risk of exploitation.
- Participating States and Honorable Colleagues: Consider adopting and fully implementing the “Optional Protocols to the Convention of the Rights of the Children on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography”. As underlined in Article 8 and 9 of the Protocol, states parties are required to adopt measures to protect the rights and interests of child victims of the practices prohibited under the Protocol at all stages of the criminal justice process and *to take all feasible measures with the aim of ensuring all appropriate assistance to victims including their full social reintegration and their full physical and psychological recovery.*
- While this protocol maybe optional, our commitment to protect children cannot be optional. It is our responsibility as a society, as governments/states, and as systems of care to protect and serve children.
- As a male survivor of trafficking, I ask for the intentional and strategic engagement of male-identifying victims and survivors of trafficking. We are often overlooked and often are seen as perpetrators; I invite you to see us as people whom circumstances have put us in suffering and deserve to seek justice, heal and recover. I ask that you believe us, believe male survivors of slavery and trafficking.
- As survivor of trafficking and a person with disabilities, I ask you to see me as a whole person, with hopes, aspirations and goals. I ask member states to create mechanisms to reach people with visual, hearing, tactile, disabilities/ability needs. Create reporting mechanism for people who speak, sign or uses other forms of communication. Because we must first ensure Equity, before we can all enjoy Equality.
- Participating states, and honorable colleagues, you have the unique ability to advocate and elevate the needs of survivors of exploitation, slavery and/or human trafficking all around the world. I ask that you continue to elevate the needs of survivors and voices of those with different abilities/disabilities, visual and hearing needs, speaking unique languages and sharing their unique perspective. Today you heard from a person with mobile disabilities, I ask that tomorrow you listen to children and adults with visual needs and speaking their unique language.

- Participating states; as a then foreign national victim of trafficking without immigration status in the USA, I'm honored to have now achieved USA citizenships thanks to then good humanitarian policy. Participating states: I ask for strong humanitarian policies and immigration regulations that offer a path to citizenship for survivors of slavery, human trafficking and other forms of human rights violations. Human trafficking doesn't happen in a vacuum, we must work collaboratively, offer education, unlearn outdated practices and embrace survivors empowering practices.
- Participating States, Honorable Colleagues: Children across the world at this very moment are being hurt, harm, forced, exploited, marked, severed, stolen, moved, displaced, persecuted, married, bombed, murdered, and often forgotten. We can not afford another generation of children of trauma, born into trauma, suffering trauma and live a life of trauma. We must protect children, uphold and inform them about their rights.