

# Talitha Kum's **Call to Action**



**TALITHA KUM**  
The international network of  
consecrated life against trafficking

# Talitha Kum

## A Network of Spiritual Cooperation for Solidarity and Action against Human Trafficking and Exploitation

**“Talitha Kum. Little girl, I say to you, rise up.”** Jesus addressed these words to Jairus’ daughter, a 12-year-old girl who lay apparently dead. When Jesus took her hand, she immediately stood up and began to walk.

These words invite Talitha Kum’s networks to rise up with courage and hope, and stand with victims and survivors of trafficking in persons, whose hands reach out to us, to promote a just world in which every human being can live in dignity and fullness, thus fulfilling Christ’s message: “I have come that they may have life, life in its fullness.”<sup>2</sup> Faith and spirituality make tangible the presence of God to transform the most hopeless situations, and raise to life what appears to be dead.

By referring to the transformative power of hope, compassion and mercy – which underpins an active engagement for the restoration of the dignity of the exploited and oppressed as valuable members of the human family – the expression Talitha Kum defines the identity and mission of our global umbrella network that gathers more than 3,000 Catholic sisters, allies and friends. Formally established in 2009 as an international initiative against human trafficking and exploitation, Talitha Kum is organized in 60 local networks across nearly 90 countries, actively supporting victims, survivors and people at risk. While each Talitha Kum network retains its unique identity and operates within its own country or region, the Coordination Committee at the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) supports capacity development and training of networks and members, and facilitates the sharing of information, resources and experiences.

As an umbrella network of Sisters-led networks, Talitha Kum is grounded in the long, rich tradition of Catholic women, inspired by the life-giving ministry of Christ, who are committed to community work and collaboration, following the example of the Triune God: “Three persons in one, each with distinct roles but intimately united as one force, working together in love for the flourishing of life ... and towards a common vision: a world without trafficking.”<sup>3</sup> The strength of the Talitha Kum network lies in its bottom-up, grassroots engagement and in its person- and community-centered approach, which ensures proximity to victims and survivors of trafficking, their families, and those at risk of exploitation.

Our work with victims and survivors of human trafficking is grounded in the belief that the dignity of the oppressed and exploited can be restored through sororal and fraternal relationships, marked by the presence of the Holy Spirit and the mysterious encounter with God. In a relationship between equals, Sisters walk together with victims along the path of healing, as they regain a deep awareness of their inner value as individuals and members of their families and communities. In this manner, Talitha Kum addresses the systemic causes that leave people at risk of falling into the hands of trafficking networks, engaging families and local communities together with key stakeholders at the national and international level. As part of this effort, Talitha Kum networks supported 15,827 survivors in 2020.<sup>4</sup>



# TALITHA KUM

## A NETWORK OF SPIRITUAL COOPERATION FOR SOLIDARITY AND ACTION AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION

Rooted in Gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching,<sup>5</sup> Talitha Kum chooses to stand by those who are deep in the darkness of social vulnerability, oppression and exploitation, providing spiritual sustenance for a new, dignified life. For this reason, “Talitha Kum enters into the violent narrative of exploitation and trafficking in persons, weaving together gestures of welcome, care, empowerment, inclusion and good.”<sup>6</sup> In doing so, Talitha Kum stands against political, economic, financial, social and cultural inequalities and inequities, and cares for people wounded by exploitation, making no distinctions of gender or sexual orientation, age, race or ethnic origin, language, religion, nationality, belief, disability, political or other opinions, membership of a national minority, property, birth or any other status.

### NOTE

**1** Mark 5, 41.

**2** John 10, 10.

**3** J. L. Lay and C. Jackson, “The Spirituality of Talitha Kum”, UISG Bulletin, Number 172, 2020, p. 23.

**4** For more information see: [https://www.talithakum.info/files/documentdownload/2020/TALITHA\\_KUM\\_2020\\_DATABASE\\_eng.pdf](https://www.talithakum.info/files/documentdownload/2020/TALITHA_KUM_2020_DATABASE_eng.pdf).

**5** Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium Et Spes, Promulgated by his Holiness, Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965,

[https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html);

Encyclical Letter Laudato Si of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home,

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html);

Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti of The Holy Father Francis on Fraternity and Social Friendship,

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html);

Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium of the Holy Father Francis to The Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World,

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html);

Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking, <https://migrants-refugees.va/documents/en/email/pastoral-orientations-on-human-trafficking.pdf>.

**6** G. Bottani and S. Volpicelli, “Talitha Kum: History Written by Religious Women”, UISG Bulletin, Number 172, 2020, p. 5.



# THE CALL TO ACTION: CARE, HEAL, EMPOWER AND RESTORE

Talitha Kum's Call to Action is addressed to Sisters, to the Catholic Church and religious leaders of other religious or spiritual traditions, to non-believers, to allies, friends and all people of goodwill who share our vision of a world free from human trafficking and exploitation. In particular, this Call to Action wishes to reach out to global governance stakeholders including states, international organizations, non-state actors such as civil society groups, private sector organizations and academic institutions, and all those who have a role to play in the tireless effort towards the eradication of human trafficking and exploitation.

Drawing upon the insights of Talitha Kum networks and members working in the field, and on the Final Declaration adopted on the 27th of September 2019 marking the 10th anniversary of Talitha Kum, this Call to Action is shaped around four main objectives:

- to **care** for victims of human trafficking and exploitation, and for people at risk;
- to **heal** physical, psychosocial and spiritual wounds;
- to **empower** victims and survivors, as well as individuals at risk, by amplifying their voices;
- to **restore** human dignity by promoting access to justice.

In order to achieve these objectives, Talitha Kum wishes to invite stakeholders to join forces in the following key areas of engagement, which are particularly impactful at the level of individuals, communities and systems.

***Ensuring access to justice and long-term, state-supported psychosocial and health assistance, as well as work and residence permits for victims in destination countries.***

"Victims are the first in need of rehabilitation and reintegration in society." "All of society is called to grow in this awareness, especially with regard to national and international legislation, in order to be able to ensure that traffickers be brought to justice and their unjust earnings redirected for the rehabilitation of victims."<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, "to be recognized as a victim is hard work. When assisting victims in dealing with bureaucratic legal procedures, Sisters are usually confronted with the stumbling block of proving that trafficked persons are not guilty of other crimes, such as violating immigration laws, labour laws, family laws or other criminal code provisions. In addition, victims usually have to prove that as trafficked persons they did not consent to their exploitation, which can often be challenging".<sup>8</sup> Talitha Kum believes that victims should be treated with compassion, as well as full respect and recognition of their dignity.



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*To this end, the network calls in particular on global governance stakeholders for:*

- the provision of state-supported legal services to trafficked persons, and appropriate measures to guarantee their safety and the safety of those assisting them;
- the application of the non-punishment clause to presumed and de facto victims for crimes committed as a consequence or in the course of being trafficked;
- the compensation of damages;
- access to effective, long-term, state-supported psychosocial and health assistance, as well as residence and employment permits and opportunities, as key for victims to regain self-worth, confidence and self-esteem, and thus avoid re-victimization;
- trafficker-centered investigation and prosecution strategies, including in challenging environments such as the World Wide Web and social media, and with the use of new tools such as cryptocurrencies;
- the promotion of well-tailored forms of procedural, restorative and transitional justice that guarantee the healing process of victims and survivors.

## ***Empowering women and girls, as well as their families and communities.***

Talitha Kum is determined to counteract the power differential between men and women in all sectors – economic, social, familial, political, cultural and religious – as a key factor contributing to the objectification and denigration of women and to the subsequent culture of violence, a heinous expression of which is human trafficking for sexual exploitation, labour exploitation and other forms of exploitation.

*To this end, Talitha Kum calls in particular on global governance stakeholders for measures to:*

- improve awareness of and promote action to eliminate gendered power imbalances, taking into account intersections between gender and other social categories such as ethnic origin, social status and disability, and the cumulative effects produced by multiple forms of discrimination;
- ensure equal access to quality education, vocational training and job opportunities for girls and women, particularly for survivors of human trafficking and those at risk of being trafficked;
- guarantee equal labour rights for women, particularly in female-dominated sectors more prone to exploitation such as domestic and care work, agriculture, food processing and packaging, tourism and hospitality.

## ***Supporting safe and legal migration pathways, including in cases of forced displacement.***

Talitha Kum recognizes that legal migration pathways have shrunk globally, including in cases of forced displacement, reducing the possibility for individuals to travel through safe channels. Individuals are increasingly prevented from accessing opportunities for human security<sup>9</sup> and human development abroad, which they seek because of – among other factors – protracted conflicts, poverty, instability, disasters, lack of socioeconomic opportunity, and human rights violations. This approach – often paired with political rhetoric fomenting hate, racism and xenophobia – hinders the safety, dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, including victims of trafficking and other vulnerable groups. .



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*To promote effective and legal migration pathways, Talitha Kum calls in particular on global governance stakeholders for measures towards:*

- the early detection of situations of exploitation suffered by migrants, including asylum seekers, refugees and displaced persons;
- the promotion of awareness-raising activities aimed at portraying the risks of abuse, violence and exploitation along migration pathways and in destination countries;
- the establishment of safe and legal pathways for migration, with special attention to women and girls, including in situations of forced displacement;
- the fair recruitment and treatment of migrant workers in the labour market, regardless of their legal status, with special attention to women and girls.

In doing so, Talitha Kum supports Pope Francis' invitation to welcome, protect, promote and integrate migrants, refugees and internally displaced people, in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of human traffickers.<sup>10</sup>

## **Promoting an economy of care and solidarity.**

Talitha Kum embraces Pope Francis' message for the 7th International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking (February 8th, 2021):

“An economy without human trafficking is an economy of care. Care can be understood as taking care of people and nature, offering products and services for the growth of the common good. An economy that cares for work, creating employment opportunities that do not exploit workers through degrading working conditions and grueling hours.”

In doing so, Talitha Kum recognizes that increasing socioeconomic disparities provide fertile grounds for human trafficking to flourish, and strives towards a long-term, systemic transformation from an economy of trafficking to an economy of care and solidarity. The latter must also favour sustainable and integral development, in light of the environmental crisis which affects our common home, the Earth.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, the network calls in particular on global governance stakeholders for:

- Ethical and responsible business and consumption models that are based on global value chains unrelated to human trafficking and exploitation, and that promote human dignity and environmental sustainability, including action aimed at tackling climate change;
- the socioeconomic integration and inclusion of survivors of human trafficking and individuals at risk.



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## NOTE

- 7** Pope Francis, Statement to the “Judges’ Summit on Human Trafficking and Organized Crime”, 3 June 2016, and Address to the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 18 April 2015 “Religious Women”, UISG Bulletin, Number 172, 2020, p. 5.
- 8** Speech by Gabriella Bottani, smc Co-ordinator and 2019 U.S. TIP Report Heroes Award Winner, Talitha Kum International at the 20th Conference of the Alliance against Trafficking in Persons “Ending Impunity Delivering Justice through Prosecuting Trafficking in Human Beings”, Vienna and Online, 22-22-July 2020, <https://www.osce.org/cthb/463563>.
- 9** See section on “Relevant International Standards for Talitha Kum’s Work”.
- 10** Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2018 “Welcoming, Protecting, Promoting and Integrating Migrants and Refugees”, 14 January 2018.
- 11** Encyclical Letter Laudato Si of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home, cit., § 13-14.



# UNITED IN PRAYER FOR ACTION

On February 8th the Catholic Church celebrates Saint Josephine Bakhita, born in Sudan, who was kidnapped and sold into slavery as a child. Once freed, Saint Josephine became a Canossian Sister who dedicated her life to testifying to her faith in God and comforting the poor and suffering.

In the footsteps of Saint Josephine Bakhita, on February 8th each year Talitha Kum celebrates the International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking, an occasion to join in prayer, reflection and awareness regarding the evil of human trafficking, and the power of joint action for the care, healing, empowerment and restoration of victims, survivors and individuals at risk.

Talitha Kum's Call to Action wishes to encourage all relevant actors and stakeholders to join its Sisters in prayer and reflection, following Pope Francis' invitation: "This Day is important because it helps us all to remember this tragedy, and encourages us not to stop praying and fighting together. May reflection and awareness always be accompanied by concrete gestures, which also open up paths to social emancipation."<sup>12</sup>

## NOTE

**12** Video Message of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Participants in the 7th World Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action against Human Trafficking, L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly edition in English, 12 February 2021, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2021/documents/papa-francesco\\_20210208\\_videomessaggio-contro-trattapersona.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2021/documents/papa-francesco_20210208_videomessaggio-contro-trattapersona.html).





# RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FOR TALITHA KUM'S WORK

Talitha Kum is aware of international standards on trafficking in persons, and acknowledges the international definition of 'trafficking in persons' contained in the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted in Palermo in 2000. In this regard, the network recognizes the definitional complexity of the multifaceted phenomena of human trafficking, exploitation and modern slavery.

Talitha Kum considers 'modern slavery', 'modern forms of slavery', 'contemporary slavery', or 'contemporary forms of slavery' to be umbrella terms that cover multiple forms of severe exploitation including in particular slavery, practices similar to slavery such as debt bondage and servitude, forced labour, child, early and forced marriages, and the worst forms of child labour, including the exploitation of child soldiers.

The network acknowledges international human rights, labour, and asylum legal standards as relevant for its work, and in particular: the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocols on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (CRC-OPSC) and on the involvement of children in armed conflicts (CRC-OPAC); the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD); the 1950 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol; the 1926 Slavery Convention and the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery; the 1930 Forced Labour Convention N. 29 and its 2014 Protocol.

Moreover, in its work towards caring for, healing, empowering and restoring victims and survivors, Talitha Kum considers relevant the 2002 Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking, the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW), and the 1985 United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power.

Talitha Kum is aware of ongoing efforts towards a global governance of migration and asylum, and acknowledges stakeholders' cooperation – in the framework of the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees – as including specific actions in the field of human trafficking and exploitation.



# RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FOR TALITHA KUM'S WORK

In working towards the prevention of human trafficking, Talitha Kum considers its engagement relevant towards the realization of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

- SDG 5 Gender equality, Target 2, which endeavors to eliminate “all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation”; and Target 3, which addresses the elimination of harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriages;
- SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth, Target 7, which aims to “take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms”;
- SDG 10 Reduced inequalities, Target 4, which aims to adopt “policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality”; and Target 7, which calls on states to “facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”;
- SDG 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions, Target 2, which seeks to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children”.

Finally, Talitha Kum also acknowledges the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/290 of the 10th of September 2012, which promotes a common understanding of the concept of human security as including: “(a) The right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. All individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential; (b) ... people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people and all communities; (c) recognition of the interlinkages between peace, development and human rights, and of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights”.

*Roma, 25 Nov 2021*



