



UISG Plenary Assembly 2022: "Embracing Vulnerability on the Synodal Journey"

Report of Talitha Kum to the Superiors General

Rome, May 5th, 2022

By Sr. Gabriella Bottani, smc – International Coordinator

Dear Superiors general,

We meet again after three very special years. In 2019, the tenth anniversary of the creation of Talitha Kum International at the UISG has been an important milestone for Talitha Kum. Over the past three years, anti-trafficking efforts have grown thanks to the creation of new networks, increased collaboration, and the care for people through healing and empowering processes. More lay staff, sharing our vision and mission, joined us.

We suffered from the pandemic, which – together with the environmental crisis – accentuated other crises: food insecurity, political instability, and the real economic crisis with consequent growth in unemployment, particularly among women. Those who most paid the price are the groups suffering from multiple discrimination, especially women, children, and people in regions impoverished by exploitation. Let us not forget that the rise in female unemployment rates is directly related to the increase in human trafficking and prostitution. The pandemic has introduced new *modus operandi* of traffickers, which challenge the models we have built since the 1990s. Yet this period has also united us more and made us grow in solidarity and in considering the value of care.

We are going through a time of crisis. This is a vulnerable time, a precious moment that requires us to live in constant conversion, which is about change and daring new paths.

I am deeply moved and grateful to be able to share with you the extraordinary commitment of the leadership of the sisters to fulfill the mission of Talitha Kum. In this difficult context, they implemented new models of responding to today's needs in the 3 constitutive areas of Talitha Kum International: Networking, Training, and Communication, and in the 3 specific areas chosen by the General Assembly of Talitha Kum for the period 2020-2025: Advocacy, Prevention, and Survivor Engagement. Asia and Africa were identified as the geographical priority by the 2019 Assembly. I will now share some indicators, which highlight Talitha Kum's trends for this past three-year period.

Priority 1: NETWORKING.

From 2019 to 2021, Talitha Kum registered significant growth in all sectors. I will be reporting only two figures as examples:

+ 8 national networks (in addition, in 2022, we have already received requests for the creation of new networks in Bolivia, Malaysia, Mali, Togo, and Angola);

+ 4000 active members of the networks.

Moreover, the Networks reported a growth in the numbers of people reached, as well as survivors and victims accompanied. By the end of June 2022, Talitha Kum / UISG will release the annual report with more details.

- Covid-19 forced us to change. After a moment of crisis and adaptation experienced in 2020, the networks began using online means of communication that not only kept alive the collaboration between religious congregations part of Talitha Kum, but also fostered expansion and coordination beyond national borders, facilitating the exchange of best practices at regional and continental levels. This process led to some interesting developments in the way networking is coordinated with the creation of hubs. For example, in 2021, Talitha Kum Asia reorganized itself on a continental level, creating hubs for training, networking, and communication. Meanwhile, in Africa, an organizational continental team was nominated. After shaping their continental identity, they created 5 linguistic/territorial hubs. In early 2022, Latin America Networks also embarked on a new path of organization for better coordination.
- We have seen significant growth in lay collaborators, including people who have experienced the drama of trafficking, while we have observed a slight decrease in the number of female and male religious congregations actively participating in local Talitha Kum networks.
- We have also become aware that the synodal process, undertaken by the Church, requires us to clarify our identity and belonging to Religious Life, especially Female. Our identity values collaboration, allowing the Church and Society to be enriched by the foundational Charisms that God gives through our lives. These Charisms contribute to the Church and the building of the Kingdom of God. In this process, we too are enriched by diversity. For this reason, Talitha Kum, with great support from the UISG Executive, whom I thank, has promoted dialogue and greater relationships within the networks and with the National Conferences of Major Superiors, and through them with the Bishops' Conferences and other Church organizations committed to anti-trafficking.
- In these 3 years, we have also increased collaboration with people of other religions.

PRIORITY 2: TRAINING

During these three years, Talitha Kum International trained:

- 58 new Talitha Kum leaders. At the beginning of 2022, the third Training Course for Talitha Kum leaders began. For the first time, it is in three languages, with the participation of 32 religious women and men from 22 different countries, in collaboration with the Pontifical University Antonianum and the Tangaza University College.
- 198 religious sisters and brothers have benefited from Talitha Kum's basic courses, mostly in Africa and Asia.

PRIORITY 3: COMMUNICATION

The UISG Bulletin NUMBER 172, published in 2020, was entirely dedicated to the tenth anniversary of Talitha Kum.

Data collection from every network is now a crucial process of Talitha Kum/UISG. This year, 94.5% of networks responded, recording an increase compared to 2019.

Finally, Talitha Kum International was able to implement a communication plan for its social media and for the [International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking](#), for which we started a new gathering modality: 8 hours of a live-streaming marathon of prayer. Last February 8th, 11 thousand people connected from all over the world, following the moments of prayer, testimonies, and reflections. Pope Francis also shared a video message. I invite you to follow our social media and visit the Talitha Kum website www.talithakum.info – also accessible through the UISG website.

SPECIFIC AREA 1: ADVOCACY

On November 25th, 2021, the sisters of the International Coordination Committee of Talitha Kum presented the Talitha Kum's Call to Action, in the presence of Card. Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, Ambassadors to the Holy See, and several other people who have been accompanying our work for some time. The Call to Action is the first advocacy document ratified and endorsed by the Executive of the International Union of Superiors General. It is an important step for all of us. Talitha Kum's Call to Action (of which you can find the full version in the Plenary folder) is addressed to all of us sisters, the Catholic Church, religious leaders from other religious or spiritual traditions, non-believers, collaborators, friends, and all people of goodwill who share our vision of a world free 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, and rooted in the Word of God and Church Social Teaching, this call to action is shaped around four main key concepts:

- 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 calls upon stakeholders and global governance 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.
- Empowering women and girls, as well as their families and communities.
- Supporting safe and legal migration pathways, including in cases of forced displacement.
- Promoting an economy of care and solidarity. The document echoes the words of Pope Francis for the 7th International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking: *"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 gruelling hours."

The joint activation of Talitha Kum's networks in the area of advocacy followed a path of dialogue and movement among the different coordinating entities of the networks, from local to international, which allowed for the final drafting of the document. Now the networks have been engaged in order to transpose the document and translate it into a model of advocacy that has local communities as protagonists.

SPECIFIC AREA 2: Collaboration with survivors.

Since September 2021, Talitha Kum International has welcomed Joy Ezekiel, a Talitha Kum Anti-Trafficking Youth Ambassador, into the team. The involvement of young people as protagonists (and not only as targets of awareness-raising activities) comes from an intuition of the Asian networks. They selected 25 young people representing 16 countries, to train and involve them, in collaboration with the sisters, as active subjects for the transformation of culture and to promote a language close to young people. Joy, who is here with us at the Talitha Kum stand, has written a letter addressed to all the general superiors on behalf of the youth ambassadors, which you can also find in the online folder. The Talitha Kum Anti-Trafficking Youth Ambassadors are getting a lot of attention, because they are part of the first pastoral experience that involves young people as protagonists against human trafficking. Surely, this initiative will expand to different networks and contexts. Youth will have a privileged space in the celebration of the International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking 2023, a Day entrusted by the Holy Father to the International Unions of Religious Women and Men and coordinated since its first edition in 2015 by Talitha Kum. The involvement of young people as protagonists and the attention to victims, survivors, and people at risk of trafficking will be the foundations on which to elaborate the **third specific area** decided by the General Assembly of Talitha Kum related to **Prevention**, which Talitha Kum will focus on starting from 2023.

In this particular three-year period, Talitha Kum has demonstrated a generative life force. The sisters from the networks have embraced the vulnerabilities of our time, but more importantly, we have allowed ourselves to be embraced by these vulnerabilities. This is the power of the cross, giving us the grace to touch the Spirit of the Risen Christ, who continues to call and send us. During this time, our acting together has been confirmed several times by the Magisterium of the Church, especially by the words of the Holy Father Pope Francis. In this regard, I wanted to remind you of what he told us during the Talitha Kum General Assembly of 2019:

"Your work brings together the missions of different institutions and demands cooperation between them. You have chosen to be on the front line. Therefore, the numerous Congregations that have worked and continue to work as the "avant-garde" of the Church's missionary activity against the scourge of human trafficking deserve gratitude (see Address to Participants in the International Conference on Human Trafficking, 11 April 2019). This is also a model of how to work together. It is an example for the whole Church, and also for us: men, priests, bishops ... You are giving a great example – keep at it! [...] I renew my encouragement to all the women's Institutes of Consecrated Life that have organized and supported the commitment of their sisters in the fight against trafficking and in helping victims. While I invite you to continue this commitment, I also appeal to other Religious Congregations, both female and male, to join this missionary work, devoting personal service and resources so that they can reach remote corners of the earth."

Yes, with your support we have gone forward, and continue to do so, with dedication and passion. We are even more convinced that there is a need to continue to collaborate on all levels, between

you, general superiors, and us, sisters and leaders in mission, between us religious, and the laity. We ask you to be promoters in Local Churches and to the Ordinaries entrusted with pastoral responsibility, so that they may involve, engage and promote religious sisters committed within Talitha Kum, in planning and implementing anti-trafficking pastoral activities, while recognizing our identity and the coordination of the Talitha Kum networks on the local and regional levels.

I also express my gratitude to all those who have supported us with human and financial resources, making our commitment possible. And I conclude with the concluding words of the Holy Father in his message addressed during the Marathon of prayer, last February 8:

"Dear Sisters [...], I express my gratitude and encouragement to all of you: let us go forward in the struggle against human trafficking and every form of slavery and exploitation. I invite you all to keep your indignation alive — keep your indignation alive! — and to find, every day, the strength to engage with determination on this front. Do not be afraid of the arrogance of violence, no! Do not surrender to the corruption of money and power. Thank you all, and keep going, do not be discouraged! May God bless you and your work. Thank you."