

Claudio Zuccala

Southern Africa Province

Anti-Slavery campaign in the Southern Africa Province

125th Anniversary of Cardinal Lavigerie's Anti-Slavery campaign.

Many events and initiatives at the level of SAP during the year

As I am writing these lines, one of the major events organised at the level of SAP to mark the 125th anniversary of Lavigerie's Anti-Slavery campaign, has just come to an end. Initially, it had been envisaged that a bus highlighting the Anti-Slavery campaign would tour through all the sectors of the Province picking up and dropping off people as it went along. As it was, the Mozambique sector was the only one able to organise this aspect of the campaign. A minibus set off from Beira on 29th August and travelled to Tete, the boom town along the Zambezi River, picking up some people from our parishes of Dombe and Sussundenga. A two day awareness event was organised in Tete and the same happened in Chimoio a week later. Hundreds of people took part. The final event took place in Beira, at the Nazaré centre, from 12th to 15th September 2013. Conferences, debates, drama, radio and television interviews took place and there was a 4-day-long continuous and interested involvement of some 80 participants. This was a considerable achievement for our confreres in Mozambique.

Over the past ten months, other events and initiatives were organised in other sectors of the Province. In South Africa, Michel Meunier had a calendar and a book mark printed in several languages for the occasion and then gave an interview on Radio Veritas and a talk in Pretoria.



In Malawi, for the 8th December 2012 celebrations in Balaka, our students presented two excellent plays and a poem. The topic of the plays was Human Trafficking. They were lively, humorous, educative and straight to the point. On March 26th, they repeated their performance in Lilongwe at the Crossroads Hotel in Lilongwe in front of a wider audience.

In Zambia, on 26th November 2012, our confreres in Kasama combined Founder's Day with the opening of the Anniversary year of the Anti-Slavery campaign. As part of their celebrations, they had an input by Paul Johnston on the Anti-Slavery campaign of Lavigerie and its place within the history of our Society.

In February, it was decided to print a leaflet which would point out the urgency and the relevance of fighting contemporary slavery. The layout proved to be a success and it was reprinted in all the other sectors with the necessary adaptations and translations. Thousands of copies were disseminated throughout the Province. In April, our confreres in Chipata organized a one day event on modern forms of slavery.

Then in July, five of our confreres wrote articles which were published for five successive weeks by one of the most widely circulated Zambian newspapers, The Post.

Back in South Africa, on the 2nd of August, Michel Meunier gave a public conference to students and lecturers of Cedara Institute on "Modern day slavery: Human-trafficking – our (Church) Response to this Social Evil".

Our blog and our newsletter Motomoto did a good job in reminding and keeping us informed about what was happening and keeping our interest alive.

The interest our confreres took in this Anniversary campaign

More difficult to quantify is the seriousness and the depth to which each one of us took in this campaign in terms of interest, prayer, personal reading, research and private initiatives. The same is true when one tries to identify the extent of our commitment to the cause in terms of how we

celebrated, communicated and informed people on this issue in our regular activities, be it in a parish or in our centres or, for that matter, in whatever ministry we are involved.

As in many other cases, one could see the glass as being half full or half empty. The truth is that it is both. There's no denying that some of us got really interested in the strong appeal that came from Rome and invested time in getting more knowledgeable on the subject and then getting involved in lots of different ways. It must also be said that there was a considerable level of indifference and lack of concern, which was apparent in the answers to the questionnaire I recently circulated.



What proved really difficult was the attempt to organize some common activities at the level of the Province. Maybe the leaflet, conceived in Zambia and quickly “adopted” by all the other sectors, was the only common project we had while the great vision of an itinerant caravan that would cross three of our sectors never got off the ground.

The idea of a bus journey was expected to arouse both a historically-based and modern-day awareness on the shameful scourge of slavery. It was supposed to be some kind of Missionary Route, with a permanent team on board, picking up and dropping off different groups of people as it moved along from Zambia through Malawi and into Mozambique.

Maybe the project was not properly presented and/or understood and there is no point now in playing the blame game on who should have done what and why it didn't happen. I see it as an inherent weakness of our mega province which from many points of view is a unit only on paper.

Another weak point was that there was little cooperation with the local Church and other religious and lay groups and the relatively poor use of the mass media.

In any case, we are now being asked to look for some concrete steps to take in the near future, given the fact that as one phase comes to an end, a second one is about to begin. How are we going to decide on some real action in order to fight today's unjust systems?

Some of the most interesting suggestions

Some of the most interesting suggestions that came through the above mentioned questionnaire mentioned:

A 'Name and Shame Campaign' over a two year period, which would necessitate research, analysis, a plan of action, people to implement it, deadlines, responses and reports, leading to a final document.

We could continue to raise awareness by organizing sessions and conferences and sharing information. We owe it to ourselves and to the people we serve by identifying unjust systems and the people behind them that keep millions of people in slavery.

We should network not just with church based organizations but with people from all walks of life who are deeply committed to the cause: we are not alone in this fight and we can definitely learn a lot from those who have a greater experience in the field.



If this seems too little, let us remind ourselves that the important thing is to start from somewhere. If nothing else, the Anti-Slavery anniversary should have made us all aware of the magnitude and the horrors of modern day slavery and of the urgency of our own involvement to put a stop to it.

Claudio Zuccala

From Petit Echo n° 1045 2013/9