

JUSTICE AT THE DOOR:
ENDING DOMESTIC SERVITUDE

Intercultural Human Rights Law Review Annual Symposium

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THE PRESIDENT'S WELCOME ADDRESS

REV. MONSIGNOR FRANKLYN M. CASALE*

Good morning and welcome to St. Thomas University!

Each year, I am pleased to address and extend my personal welcome to the audience at the *Intercultural Human Rights Law Review's* Symposium where issues of utmost importance are researched and discussed. This year, I join you for the discourse on "*Justice at the Door: Ending Domestic Servitude.*"

I would like to specially recognize and thank those of you who have come from several parts of our nation to share your knowledge, expertise and skills with us: all our distinguished guest speakers, panelists, government and non-governmental representatives, lawyers, service providers, religious men and women, students, faculty and the entire St. Thomas University community. I also extend a warm virtual welcome to those who have logged in and are following us on-line: we appreciate your commitment.

Our law school was founded on the premise that lawyers should be sensitive to those who need justice the most. We consider it our mission and obligation to our community to take a leadership role in promoting the cause of human rights and dignity. Since 2004, St. Thomas University has been a pioneer among academic institutions in addressing the phenomenon of human trafficking and many other critical social justice concerns. St. Thomas University is a noted leader in advocacy efforts to improve the lives of the vulnerable and promote the human dignity of persons.

* President, St. Thomas University.

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Through its many programs and activities, here and abroad, St. Thomas University has played a major role in advancing the cause of ending modern-day slavery. Our signature Graduate Program in Intercultural Human Rights and its most recent Congressionally sponsored Human Trafficking Academy, together with co- and extra-curricular programs like the *Intercultural Human Rights Law Review* and our student clubs such as the International Law Society, are all integral components in “developing leaders for life,” who will promote justice and strive to put an end to human suffering. Our community program, the Human Rights Institute, which serves so many disadvantaged migrants, and our undergraduate program in global leadership, also are in this category. I urge all of you who are present today to learn and communicate with us as we strive to create effective solutions and build the necessary dialogue and partnership to end trafficking in human beings.

I extend our thanks to the U.S. Department of State for its efforts in combating human trafficking and its constant support to our initiatives in this regard. Our gratitude also goes to the Department of Justice, who funds our Human Trafficking Academy: we are proud of its work in investigating and prosecuting trafficking in human beings, including many cases of domestic servitude.

Our topic today: domestic servitude – a topic not so often made the center of attention and discussion. January is designated as National Slavery and Human Trafficking Month, so it is particularly appropriate to focus on this topic today.

I am proud of the legacy of our university, law school and our human rights program, guided by Catholic Social Teaching and principles to improve the lives of the vulnerable and promote the human dignity of the human person.

Join me as I applaud the hard working efforts of our students and staff of the Human Trafficking Academy for developing today’s dynamic presentation. Special thanks to Professor Roza Pati and Professor Siegfried Wiessner for mentoring our extraordinary students and for successfully leading the Graduate Program in Intercultural Human Rights for over a decade now.

Domestic servitude is a particular distinct form of human

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trafficking often occurring behind closed doors – hidden away in private homes. Estimates of the number of domestic workers range from 52.6 million up to 100 million around the world. These workers clean and maintain homes, care for children and the elderly, and perform many other necessary tasks. However, way too often domestic workers are poorly treated - laboring from the early dawn to late at night with little or no rest and receiving minimal wages, or in some cases compensation is totally withheld.

In cases of domestic servitude, the invisible nature of human trafficking is heightened as survivors are not in the traditional workplace, but are shackled by the whims of their exploiter in the confines of their home. Survivors/victims are at the absolute mercy of the perpetrators of this crime who seize their essential identification and travel documents and limit their activities and movement. When I testified before the Foreign Affairs Committee of Congress, a former domestic slave testified with me. Ironically, she was held in servitude by one of her home country's diplomats here in America.

We are privileged to have professionals tracing the history of slavery and exploring the context in which domestic servitude exists. Equally important is this discussion with the panelists and contributors exploring viable solutions to this problem. Our conference title, *Justice at the Door: Ending Domestic Servitude* implies that there will be a terminus. I challenge you to mark that date clearly and work mightily toward the end of trafficking.

Thank you and God bless you.