



**INTERFAITH PRAYER VIGIL
INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER AND AWARENESS AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING
FEBRUARY 8, 2024 - ST. BAKHITA DAY**

THEME FOR THE YEAR 2024: JOURNEYING IN DIGNITY: LISTEN, DREAM, ACT

This interfaith prayer of this year's International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking is an invitation to integrate the journeying for dignity centered on the four elements of nature. We can offer prayers, reflections, and rituals that honor and connect with the elements of earth, air, fire, water, and metal in listening, dreaming, and taking action in combating human trafficking.



photo credit: Asaf Ud Daula

Here is a suggested structure for the vigil:

1. Introduction

Leader: For this year's Vigil of Prayer, we are invited to listen, dream, and act to journey with each person with dignity. We know everything is interrelated and exploitation of people cannot be tackled without a respectful relationship with all creation. Hence, we invite you to reflect on the realities of human trafficking and the five elements of nature: earth, water, air, fire, and metal.

We listen to the Earth, the foundation of human dignity, to Water and its flow of compassion and empathy, to Air, the breath of freedom and justice, to Fire, the spark of resilience and empowerment and to Metal and its ability to cut through life. By understanding this connection, we can gain insights into how to combat trafficking and promote human dignity. Listen, dream, and act for a world where people and the earth, the water, the air, the fire, and the metal praise the ONE!

Reader 1: *Gracious and loving God, we gather here today in prayer and solidarity to raise our voices against the injustice of human trafficking. We seek your guidance and strength as we journey together to bring an end to the trafficking and exploitation of human beings. May your light shine upon us and empower us to listen, dream, and act with courage. Amen.*

Silence/Music/Gong

2. Symbolic Offerings

Leader: In a world troubled with suffering and unrest, we turn to the elemental forces that shape our existence, seeking solace and understanding. The symbolic offerings of FIRE, EARTH, WATER, AIR, and METAL serve as poignant reflections on the interconnected web of challenges, particularly in the context of human trafficking. The flickering FIRE signifies the fiery trials of war and conflict, where victims often face unimaginable horrors, even perishing in deliberate acts of violence. EARTH represents the foundation of our global supply chains, addressing the root causes of poverty that fuel human trafficking. WATER embodies the struggles of migration, while AIR symbolizes the pervasive impact of global climate change. Finally, METAL speaks about the exploitation inherent in mining and labor practices, urging us to reflect on the flow of life and the urgent need for justice and compassion.

- **FIRE:** In its dual symbolism, fire is both a destructive force and a catalyst for rebirth and renewal. Greed and power have used fire as a deadly force. This candle represents the light that shines wisdom, knowledge, and divine presence in the darkness of human trafficking, wars, and conflict areas.



Reader 2: *A tangled trafficking web has been woven across the Sahel, which spans almost 6,000 kilometers from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea and is home to more than 300 million people, in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal. The Sahel is described by the UN as a region in crisis: those living there are prey to chronic insecurity, climate shocks, conflict, coups, and the rise of criminal and terrorist networks. UN agencies expect that more than 37 million people will need humanitarian assistance in 2023, about 3 million more than in 2022. (Trafficking in the Sahel: Guns, gas, and gold (unodc.org))*

Inter-Faith Texts:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Abolition of classes, discriminations, and factions within the family of God”. **(Galatians 3: 28)**

Let us pray (All)

Loving God, we pray for the victims of human trafficking, their families, those affected by wars and conflicts, and those who work tirelessly to rescue and support them. We ask for the grace of healing, protection, and liberation from the chains of violence and exploitation for each trafficked person and the victims of wars and conflicts.

Silence/Music/Gong

- **EARTH:** As we bring this bowl of soil and stones, we thank God for the Earth gently homing us, grounding us, and so generously nurturing us in a diversity of ways. We remind ourselves of the hardship of all those who suffer from poverty and mistreatment and those whose labor is unfairly valued in the supply chain of the goods we consume.



Reader 3: *As conflicts, climate change, and economic downturns continue to dominate the world stage and influence national political agendas, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is urging States not to lose focus on their obligations to combat human trafficking and support the victims of this crime. Around the world today, millions of victims of human trafficking are going unnoticed,” said UNODC Executive Director Ghada Waly. “Many of them walk among us in everyday life, on street corners and construction sites, or in factories and public venues. (“Nurturing hope: A life after trafficking (unodc.org)*

Inter-Faith Texts:

"And those who cannot afford marriage should keep themselves chaste until Allah enriches them out of His grace. And those of your slaves who wish to enter the contract of Kitābah (emancipation by paying money), contract Kitābah with them, if you recognize some good in them. And give them out of the wealth of Allah that He has given to you. And do not compel your maids to prostitution - if they wish to observe chastity - in order that you may seek the temporary benefit of worldly life. If one compels them, then after their being compelled, Allah is Most-Forgiving, Very-Merciful." **The Quran (Q.24.33)**

Let us pray (All)

God of justice, we pray for all those who suffer from hunger and/or starvation. May the richness of the fruit of the Earth be fairly distributed and not be wasted. May, through our human interconnectedness, we grow in the responsibility of caring for one another and for Mother Earth.

Silence/Music/Gong

- **WATER:** This water, the source of all life, reminds us of our Baptism, and at the same time, millions of people cross waters in search of a better life and do not always succeed. May water's cleansing, healing, and reinvigorating power give all the courage to overcome obstacles and let life flow in hope, justice, and compassion.



Reader 4: *Migrant smuggling is a global, organized crime that endangers the lives and safety of migrants. Violence, abuse, and the risk of exploitation are widespread traits of this crime. Many migrants die of thirst in deserts, perish at sea, or suffocate in containers. Smugglers take advantage of people who are escaping poverty, natural disaster, conflict or persecution, or lack of employment and education opportunities, but do not have the option to migrate legally. A global migration study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) shows that there were 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020, which equates to/is equal to 3.6 percent of the global population. (International Migrants Day: Why UNODC combats migrant smugglers)*

Inter-Faith Texts:

Diverse energies of God to mitigate sufferings. Earth, water, fire, air, and ether intertwine to create inner harmony and well-being. The journey begins with understanding the core qualities and symbolism of each element. Earth, the stable foundation beneath us, embodies grounding, stability, and nourishment qualities to stand against all odds. Water, with its flowing nature, represents emotions, adaptability, and the ebb and flow of life to alleviate suffering and show kindness to the victims of trafficking. Fire, the transformative force, symbolizes passion, energy, and the power to ignite change in the best interest of trafficked women and girl children. Air, the unseen yet ever-present element, embodies communication, intellect, and expansion to rejuvenate and live a new normal life. Lastly, ether or spirit, often considered the quintessence of all elements, signifies connection, transcendence, and divine energy to lead a peaceful life. - **The Bhagavad Gita (7.4)**

Let us pray (All)

God of life, we pray for all persons that are on the move: migrants, refugees, and displaced people that they may find in us, brothers and sisters, welcoming and supporting them in their struggles, sufferings, and hopes.

Silence/Music/Gong

- **AIR/WIND:** This symbol shows us how essential it is for all life to breathe. The global climate crisis is making millions of living beings and the Earth itself cry out, "I can't breathe!" due to gas emissions, plastic pollution, wildfires, trash, and so on. We pray for the urgency of systemic change so all life can breathe with dignity, care, and health.



Credit: Lisa Kristine

Reader 5: *“Wildlife and forest crime; crimes in the fisheries sector; illegal mining; and trafficking in precious metals, as well as in plastics and other waste: crimes that affect the environment are happening everywhere, generating vast profits for the criminal and corrupt,” stated the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Ms. Ghada Waly. (Three new expert-led UNODC legislative guides to combat crimes that affect the environment.)*

Inter-Faith Texts:

"O ye that are invested with the Bayán! Show forth that which will ensure the protection and safeguarding of children, and the rights of the weak and helpless." - **Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 37**

Let us pray (All)

God of all creation, help us to discern your Spirit in the world around us, listening and responding to the cry of the Earth and the cry of all who are suffering, particularly of human trafficking and climate injustices.

Silence/Music/Gong

- **METAL:** As we bring this piece of metal, we acknowledge the value of metal for life, health care, and industrial and technological development. At the same time, we reflect on the lives of those working in mining, the pollution of the rivers with heavy metals and the destruction of the environment, the biodiversity losses, and the communities who have their livelihood threatened by mining activities.



Credit: Lisa Kristine

Reader 6: Human traffickers, who trick people with fake job offers and promises and then exploit them for profit, are taking advantage of online technologies for every step of their criminal activities. Research conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) shows how victims are being targeted and recruited via social media and online dating platforms where personal information and details of people's locations are readily available. Sexual abuse and other forms of exploitation are taking place virtually and photos and videos are sold further, on different platforms to customers worldwide, resulting in even more money for the traffickers at no additional cost. (*The Role of Technology in Human Trafficking* (unodc.org))

Inter-Faith Texts:

"Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are staggering to the slaughter. If you say, 'Behold, we did not know this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?" - Proverbs 24:11-12 **(Tanakh)**

Let us pray (All)

God of freedom, we pray for those who are exploited, enslaved, forced into labor, and denied freedom. We beseech you to release them from those oppressive chains and grant them protection and empowerment to restore their dignity. Make us instruments of your Spirit for bringing their liberation.

Silence/Music/Gong

3. Conclusion

Leader: Loving and Gracious God, at the end of our gathering, receive our grateful hearts for your presence and guidance. Help us to be strongly committed to taking action against human trafficking and bless our efforts to raise awareness and support all people of goodwill in fighting against trafficking and exploitation. We appeal for stronger laws and policies against any form of slavery. Strengthen each one of us so that we continue fighting until every person is free. We entrust to You our pledge and commitment.

Saint Josephine Bakhita, Pray for us!



The vigil of Prayer was compiled and prepared by the JPIC (UISG/USG) – Anti-trafficking working group (Rome)