



**Talitha Kum General
Assembly
Voices from Oceania**

Marguerite Buckley

Two overwhelming emotions remain with me after my week with 160 delegates from Talitha Kum networks across the globe. The first is humility in the presence of these generally poorly resourced women whose grass roots work remains of special significance for them, who maintain that bringing the centrality of God’s loving presence to victims is essential and who wish to look beyond to the elimination of human trafficking through awareness raising and education. I felt humbled by their work and by their stories of the abject poverty and absolute denial of opportunity of those whom they serve. Along with this humility I also felt a deep sense of hope. There was a palpable sense of God’s presence throughout the General Assembly. There was hope in the determination to address the root causes of human trafficking: demand, greed and corruption. There was hope in the desire to collaborate with new partners and new friends in order to address human trafficking issues locally and to use our collective influence to bring about systemic change – in societal attitudes and laws.

Oceania was not silent in all this. Izzy Salter told of SA’s University trial embedding human trafficking awareness raising into tertiary studies and of VIC’s Schools’ Project which aims to provide deep learning of human trafficking issues with secondary school students. I was fortunate to deliver Colleen Jackson’s presentation on the Companionship Program in her absence. These addresses were well received and, along with presentations from a number of different networks, were a great way to learn from the experience and actions of others. The Declaration was achieved using the synodal process and sets the direction for Talitha Kum networks for the period 2025 – 2030. I am truly grateful to have attended the General Assembly this May.

Maureen Delaney

The most significant moment for me at the Assembly was putting human faces to the terrible scourge of trafficking. Hearing firsthand accounts of how traffickers operate and the impact on victim/survivors awakened in me not just compassion but a deep-seated desire to see an end to this "heinous crime". The area of the future directions that we can collaborate on - As the world becomes more and more oriented to the use of AI, social media generally and deep fake videos ACRATH will need to work with its international counterparts to promote cyber safety and to raise awareness among young people of the risks of online trafficking. To this end ACRATH will need to broaden its collaboration with young people as well as leaders of all faith communities, government and non- government organisations.

Catherine Edwards

The conference was a vibrant space for sharing, learning, and planning the future direction of Talitha Kum for the next five years, featuring invaluable grassroots experiences from people worldwide. In the five years since the last Talitha Kum gathering, the world has faced significant changes, including a global pandemic, multiple conflicts, and the rise of new technologies, including TikTok and artificial intelligence. The presence of 153 delegates showcased the extensive reach of the Talitha Kum network and the importance of sharing best practices to implement in our communities. I am deeply grateful for the dedicated individuals tirelessly working to end human trafficking. Listening to their stories was humbling and inspiring, reinforcing the need to work together, share best practices, and continue our efforts against human trafficking with renewed commitment.

Esther Powell dolc

The highlights for me we many.

- To be in the same room with TK N international members was empowering knowing on a deeper level were not alone and sisters/ members are on this same movement.
- It was a huge learning curve just listening not only to the panellists but the table I was assigned to - where we listened respectfully and to hear things that resonate with our Pacific Islands, and some that discussed were new for me.
- Certainly, listening to survivors, and that the people closest to the problems also have the solutions. This is so true in my experience with social work. The answers are within the struggling communities. This bottom-up approach journeying with people at grassroots and discovering pathways forward.

Margaret Ng, RSJ

As I reflected on what was speaking to me at the Assembly, I became aware of the African proverb that said that 'it takes a village to raise a child'. However, the reality of today is that we are all part of the Global Village and so I am reminded that it takes us, the Global Village, to raise a child.

The sharing of the Survivors, Youth Ambassadors and Speakers, as well as the delegates gave me much hope as there was a great spirit of "working together" to bring about change and transformation to combat the heinous crime of Human Trafficking. We are called to be Prophets of Hope in our efforts to address the issue of Human Trafficking. We can do this by working in collaboration, not only among ourselves and local and international governments but also with other organisations, no matter what their race, religion, cultural backgrounds or gender. We can do this by listening to the voices of, and respecting the human dignity of the individual – keeping the victim/survivor at the centre of our deliberations. They have much to offer us.

For our future directions, I look forward to working with everyone, no matter who and where they are, and I am encouraged by the acceptance of my recommendation of an International Directory for Talitha Kum. It is good that we, in Australia, are on the right track as we continue to work with other like-minded organisations and entities, including the NSW Anti- Slavery Commissioner and in time to come, the new Commonwealth Anti- Slavery Commissioner.

Andrea Manuelli

I was overwhelmed with the sharing of survivor stories and the challenges that they faced. Their stories brought to light the reality of exploitation in many forms. The talks given were also enlightening with the information and stories shared of their experiences in combating human trafficking and exploitation.

Future directions:

1. Set up support parishes/communities in areas where Pacific Island workers are
2. Monitor and evaluate same workers regularly
3. Set up Hotline in all Pacific Islands

4. Increase awareness and advocacy workshops
5. Spiritual and Capacity Building amongst TK members

Jeanette Atabelo

The entire experience was profoundly meaningful and powerful for me, both as a TK volunteer and as an RE teacher. What struck me the most were the listening circles. The process of sharing, listening, discerning, and reaching a consensus was truly profound. The gentle presence of the Holy Spirit flowing through each person, weaving its presence respectfully and lovingly was so evident. I am invigorated with hope, knowing that every action we take—big or small—contributes to the global effort to eradicate modern slavery. It was an inspiring experience of a Church in action, and it made me feel proud of the Church. The sharing of resources played a crucial role in our collaboration across networks. It was encouraging to see the wide variety of resources used to raise awareness about the issue in parishes, schools, and the wider community. I eagerly look forward to sharing my experience with our team in Dunedin.

Catherine Jones SMSM

The deepest and most moving memory for me of the assembly was the presence of several survivors. We were gifted with one in our listening circle, who most often contributed in silence. Very often during the assembly, I recalled my time at Caritas Bakhita House in London. The experiences of these women are engraved in my memory and commitment to the work of Talitha Kum. Inside the front door of the house is an image of St Josephine Bakhita, and I was always deeply moved to see these women touch or speak to her every time they left or came back into the house. It was a painting from this house that we focused on in a Visio Divina at morning prayer one-day. What is she inviting us to today? The survivor presence and contribution at the Assembly helped us frame priority 2 for the next five years: HOLISTIC SURVIVOR CENTRED APPROACH After the assembly Jeanette Atabelo and I visited Assisi. This photo speaks to me of how I move forward: holding the experience gently, encouraging the cricket to sing and fly away.

Izzy Salter

Attending the Talitha Kum General Assembly was a greater gift than I could have ever imagined. As the Oceania Youth Delegate, I joined a diverse table of Youth Delegates from Japan, Kenya, Thailand, the United States, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe for the week-long process of listening and discernment. It was deeply inspiring to meet other young people who are passionate about the issues of human trafficking and modern slavery, many due to their own experiences of exploitation, and to learn from their unique approaches to raising awareness and engaging youth. While it was difficult to hear about the challenges faced by some members of our group, especially those living in areas affected by widespread poverty, we felt united by the realization that the systemic causes of modern slavery are consistent across all of our regions, and empowered by the potential for greater collaboration between ourselves in the future. One of our recommendations was for Talitha Kum to facilitate quarterly online meetings between Youth Delegates so we can continue to support each other and share resources.

The most significant moment of the General Assembly for me was listening to the survivor-advocate panel. Coming from ACRAH South Australia, which isn't involved in the direct accompaniment of survivors, it can be easy to feel disconnected from the issues of human trafficking and modern slavery at times. So, this experience has formed a pivotal moment in my advocacy journey. Speakers emphasised the importance of targeting *demand* for sex trafficking through the education of boys and men, the need to be mindful of the language we use in relation to survivors ('victim' is not always appropriate – if someone is experiencing modern slavery and is still alive, they're already a survivor!), and the power of financially supporting survivor-led organisations. Fuelled by their strong calls-to-action, I feel more motivated than ever to continue my advocacy against the scourge of human trafficking.

From Annette Arnold, RSJ

The morning the delegates from the Middle East led us in prayer was a moment that took my breath away. They were a small group of women but dynamic and told of the horror of their region of Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, torn apart by war and conflict. As the prayer ended, delegates just started standing — it was such a tangible witness to solidarity! The Middle East Network, *Wells of Hope*, brings together Christian and Muslim women. As others have said, the words of survivors will continue to hit me and urge me onwards.

My table was close to the two Youth Delegate tables and their presence and energy stirred me greatly and sparked great hope for the future. Their passion, intelligence, commitment and solidarity with each other together with their openness to the whole group was inspiring.

The future for Talitha Kum is bright with such solidarity and commitment to work globally together—there is no other way. It was great that it was clearly named the work that has to continue on educating boys and men.