

RECONCILIATION

STOP SEXUAL VIOLENCE - SPEAK UP!

Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM) works to stop sexual violence and end human trafficking

*The PC(USA) is accompanying the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM) as it works courageously to **stop sexual violence** and human trafficking and to minister to survivors of sexual exploitation.*

In October 2010, the body of a young woman named Mampionona arrived in Madagascar aboard a flight from Lebanon.

Like many women in Madagascar—where more than 90% of the population eek out a living on less than \$2 per day—Mampionona had hoped that a job overseas would better enable her to provide for her family. A military coup d'état in March 2009 had deposed Madagascar's democratic government and introduced added economic stress on the island nation's 23 million inhabitants. Factories closed, unemployment soared and many households struggled to make ends meet. Hundreds of thousands of children left school to hawk wares in the street, tend fields or do other jobs to supplement family incomes.



Returned workers Clara and Fabienne discuss their ordeal.

For women, in particular, seemingly lucrative foreign opportunities looked especially attractive, especially as portrayed by unscrupulous labor recruiters. But for many, the reality was very different. Guest workers frequently report enduring 16 to 20 hour workdays, having their wages and passports withheld, and receiving inadequate food or medical care. They are often forced to sleep in closets, on the floor of the kitchen or laundry room, or outside. And, like Mampionona, they can be subjected to extreme physical or sexual abuse.

In response to Madagascar's political and economic crises, the FJKM established a Chaplaincy to Marginalized People, known as SAFFIFAA, to address the needs of an increasingly vulnerable population. Rev. Helivao Poget, an FJKM pastor with a Master's degree in social work, heads the ministry.

Pastor Helivao and her team have been responsible for identifying hundreds of women trapped in abusive labor contracts in Lebanon and Kuwait and helping them to return to Madagascar. SAFFIFAA staff members typically meet the women on their arrival back in Madagascar, assist those who need medical or psychological treatment to obtain it, and ultimately help many to be reunited with their families. Regional Liaison Doug Tilton closely accompanied Rev. Helivao in this process.



Pastor Helivao (far right) and her team at SAFFIFAA.

“It was only through the power and grace of God that I was able to cope with what I found in both Lebanon and Kuwait,” Pastor Helivao recalls. “God alone gave me the courage to carry on.”

But she notes that there is still much more to do. Reports indicate that there are still thousands of Malagasy nationals working in Kuwait, many of whom are likely to be in difficult circumstances. There is a need to expand domestic economic opportunities in Madagascar, particularly for women, and to promote public awareness of the dangers of human trafficking and exploitative labor contracts. The church—particularly the six million-strong FJKM—is ideally situated to share this message. SAFFIFAA is working to enrich the curriculum at FJKM seminaries to better equip future pastors to educate their congregations and confront issues such as sexual violence and human trafficking.



Students for the ministry talk to mission co-worker Christi Boyd about their experiences on the SAFFIFAA field exposure program.

For more information about SAFFIFAA’s anti-trafficking work, see the [recent letter](#) from Regional Liaison [Doug Tilton](#). For more information on the seminary field exposure program and the experiences of participants, see the [recent letter](#) from Regional Facilitator for Women’s and Children’s Interests [Christi Boyd](#). To help support the FJKM’s ministry of reconciliation and hope, please [make a gift to ECO account E052045](#). To help support the work of PC(USA) Mission Co-workers Christi Boyd and Doug Tilton, who work with FJKM to strengthen and interpret these ministries, please make a gift to [ECO account 200314 \(Christi Boyd\)](#) or [200416 \(Doug Tilton\)](#).