

British Baptists take action on migrants, human trafficking

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BRIGHTON, England (ABP)—Baptists in Great Britain are calling on their government and churches to do more for migrant workers and to oppose human trafficking around the world.

The resolution came at the May 4-7 Baptist Assembly in Brighton, the largest European Baptist event of the year. More than 2,000 were expected to attend the four-day event involving the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the BMS World Mission.

Event organizers planned the meeting to correspond with the bicentenary anniversary of the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807. They also used the occasion to launch a new campaign against human trafficking.

“This assembly recognizes that in the United Kingdom today, significant numbers of workers arriving from other countries are facing situations of abuse, poverty and exploitation,” the resolution said. It also called on the government to provide legal protection for migrant workers and on local churches to “speak out against instances of injustice and exploitation.”

Alistair Brown, the general director of BMS World Mission, challenged delegates to face modern-day slavery, noting that lifestyles in the United Kingdom still relegate many people to a lifetime of forced labor and poverty.

Baptists in Albania especially have focused on the trafficking of people within their country. According to a statement from the Christian mission agency, Albania has large numbers of women and girls trafficked through the nation. Two-thirds of them are sent to Greece or Italy, experts say.

A BMS representative for counter-trafficking, Hannah Wilson, said evangelicals in Albania have been helping trafficking victims through a women's prison ministry. They now are lobbying the Albanian government to create anti-trafficking legislation and training people in churches to know how to prevent trafficking in their communities.

A prayer of lament read to the audience by Jonathan Edwards, the general secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and Brown also acknowledged that Christians had participated in the slave trade and even profited from it.

“We recognize that, tragically, new forms of slavery have been introduced to our world and that there are still millions of people who are enslaved,” Edwards and Brown read. “We cry out now for those brutalized as prisoners of the sex industry, for those damaged by inhuman working conditions, for those sentenced to poverty by biased, unjust economic systems and for those suffering because of our exploitation of creation.”

Edwards said that “many reports of abuse and exploitation” should compel Baptist churches to welcome migrant workers and show them practical support. He also urged governing authorities to “engage in a coordinated way with the massive challenges that are posed by this influx of migrant workers.”

The Baptist conference concluded May 7, the same day as a migrant-worker rally in Trafalgar Square and a mass for migrant workers in Westminster Cathedral.

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