

OM Italy Births Anti-Trafficking Ministry

She was a beautiful Nigerian girl seeking a good job in Italy, a new world sure to offer hope and prosperity as a reward for hard work. Yet when Diamond* arrived in the land of opportunity, dreams were replaced by a frightening nightmare.

Her gracious host betrayed her promise and announced that Diamond was expected to service dozens of men per night with her body. She would be a sex slave until she paid the debt she owed for her trip to Italy.

Three years later, OMer Erika Tello and two teammates went searching for Diamond.

“We didn’t know her personally yet,” Erika said, “but we knew that she, like 25,000 other men, women and children in Italy, was a treasure hidden in the darkness of the sex trafficking industry, and we wanted to reach out to her.”

OM Italy has become increasingly aware of and burdened by the plight of victims of trafficking in Italy, but remained uncertain how to respond. Erika joined OM Italy in January 2012, along with her husband, intending to use her skills and experience to serve the marginalized in the community, especially victims of trafficking. OM Italy was supportive and God provided opportunities, like Erika’s pivotal meeting with Diamond.

One night Erika and two members of her Transform short-term outreach team found Diamond waiting for her customers. After receiving their simple gifts, she slowly shared her story.

“The most disturbing moment was when our suspicions were confirmed,” Erika said. “She was not free to leave, and with sadness in her eyes and a drop of her head, she told us she

knew no one who could help her.”

The despair Erika and her teammates felt for Diamond was rivalled by the thrill they felt knowing they wanted to help and had something to offer. They gladly gave her a hotline number she could call for help. They also shared the gospel with her and were even able to pray over her. But then the most difficult part came—leaving her.

“I remember standing there, feeling like I couldn’t turn my back on her knowing the life she was returning to,” Erika said. “I wanted to snatch her away, but instead I offered her a hug. She seemed surprised but happy to receive what I hope was felt as a truly loving gesture, in contrast to the harsh and traumatic physical acts she endures every day.”

Erika and her team members parted ways with Diamond with renewed conviction that she, and so many others, deserve better. They knew they wanted to participate in what God is doing to bring these precious treasures justice.

“The life-changing outreach experience I had with Diamond further convinced me to explore long-term ministry possibilities to combat trafficking in Italy,” Erika said.

OM Italy’s desire to help trafficking victims and Erika’s ability to spearhead efforts proved a divine combination. They launched the OM Italy Anti-Trafficking Ministry (ATM) in October 2012.

“We are a small ATM team, and our ministry is only in the infancy stages,” Erika said. “We are motivated by God’s heart for the oppressed (Psalm 10:17-18), and how He continues to open doors confirming this is the way we should go.”

**name changed*