

Esohe Aghatise, Ph.D

Dr. Esohe Aghatise is one of the leading abolitionists campaigning to eliminate global prostitution and sex trafficking. With a background in law, economics, cross cultural mediation and ethno-clinical education, she founded one of Italy's premier organizations — Association IROKO — for survivors of sex trafficking and prostitution and domestic violence.

Although Dr. Aghatise has a Ph.D in Economics and a LL.M in Law, her background is unique with expertise that goes far beyond formal education. As a Nigerian woman, she has long been familiar with the oppression of large numbers of Nigerian women, particularly from the Edo State from which 80 percent of Nigerian victims of sexual exploitation are trafficked to Europe.

In 1998, this background led Dr. Aghatise to found Association IROKO, an international NGO that was one of the first organizations in Italy specifically working with Nigerian victims of sexual exploitation. Under her leadership, IROKO expanded to serve any victim of violence against women and set up branches in Nigeria and Gambia offering services to survivors of trafficking and domestic violence. As the founder and longtime executive director of Association IROKO, she guided the organization's mission and policies, while managing and monitoring its projects, hiring staff and volunteers and providing services to over 500 women and children annually.

At the same time, Dr. Aghatise recognized the need for both inter-country NGO and government collaboration to create networks that would jointly campaign and advocate for change. This networking led to needed conferences and projects created with local partners of IROKO in Nigeria, such as the Edo Women's Development Initiative. One of the cooperative ventures between IROKO and Nigerian organizations was a TV program in Edo State on violence against women that focused on the need to change cultural assumptions and attitudes about women and girls that promote prostitution and trafficking. This inter-country collaboration has continued between IROKO and its local partners where they now use all forms of social media to convey the message to the Nigerian public about the harm of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking.

Dr. Aghatise has also met with members of the Nigerian National Assembly to promote policies and laws to combat trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation in the country. In 2018, she met with representatives of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to begin creating a network of prostitution survivors and survivor-led organizations in West Africa that would oppose all forms of sexual exploitation, especially sex trafficking and prostitution.

Since 2012, Dr. Aghatise has been a lecturer and consultant at the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Institute (UNICRI) on the dynamics of trafficking and

sexual exploitation, teaching mixed classes of young professionals and future leaders from 30 countries. She has educated them about the situation of prostitution in Nigeria focusing on abolitionist policies, the need for gender equality, and how to use UN instruments that address these issues.

In 2009, Dr. Aghatise was hired by the Norwegian Police University College to educate Norwegian trainees and police officers on gender equality, multi culturalism and diversity issues related to sex trafficking and prostitution. In this program, she also instructed immigration authorities from different regions of Norway who deal with immigrant communities and youth.

Since 2008, Dr. Aghatise has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), an international NGO with consultative status with the U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In 2010, she became a member of the Board of Directors of the Italian chapter of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).

Most recently working with other NGOs to assist, fund raise and develop public awareness of the refugee crisis in Europe and other areas of the world, Dr. Aghatise visited refugee camps in Nigeria, Italy, France and Lebanon.

Dr. Aghatise's honors and awards have been many. In 2013, she became a member of the International Women Leaders' Forum composed of women from 35 countries in positions of relevance and power. Also in 2013/2014, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) publicly recognized her work to inspire Europeans in promoting gender equality.

In 2008, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) awarded her the Nigerian government's "Service to the Nation" prize. The same year, Dr. Aghatise was awarded the Martin Luther King Jr. Prize for Human Rights by a coalition of groups that included the Municipalities of Rome and Birmingham, Alabama, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and the Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention USA.

Dr. Aghatise in 2007 was named a "Hero Acting to End Modern-Day Slavery" by the U.S. Department of State in its annual *Trafficking in Persons Report*.

Dr. Aghatise has carried out training programs for social workers and members of NGOs and has initiated a new program in Turin high schools to address the demand side of prostitution. The program is focused on educating young men about the toxic culture of masculinity, the harms of prostitution to women and girls, men's role in perpetuating prostitution as sex buyers, and men's potential role as catalysts for change in preventing prostitution, which is a root cause of sex trafficking.

Esohe Aghatise has been engaged in work to combat prostitution and sex trafficking for several decades. She is a well-known and valued expert worldwide on these issues. Governments, NGOs and other institutions frequently call on Dr. Aghatise to provide them with expert advice and trainings. Dr. Aghatise has conducted multi-level prevention and assistance education that focuses on survivors' needs and services including counseling, legal and medical aid, housing facilities, and economic assistance.

As the U.S. *Trafficking in Persons Report* stated, she is truly a "Hero Acting to End Modern-Day Slavery."

Janice Raymond