

Human Trafficking and Children

Awareness

Human trafficking (Modern Slavery) involves the use of force or fraud to control another person for purposes of exploitation. Human trafficking is a global problem—and one of the fastest growing types of crime in the world. Statistics vary widely from different sources, but the Secretary General of the United Nations (July 23, 2012, report) says 20.9 million persons have been trafficked into forced labor, with 43% of those trafficked for sexual exploitation. The United Nations' *Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking* and the UN Office of Drugs and Crime report that people are trafficked from 127 countries and exploited in 137 countries, affecting every continent and every type of economy. It has been estimated that almost every

country in the world is guilty of human trafficking, whether it is a country where trafficked people originate, or through which they are transported, or whether it serves as their destination.

Those most likely to be trafficked are women and children; 98% of those trafficked for sex and 55% trafficked for labor are women and girls.

—International Labor Organization

Since the trafficking of children is often more hidden, this crime actually may be under-reported. The majority of trafficked children are sexually exploited, but other ways in which trafficked children are exploited are for forced labor, service as child soldiers, begging, drug smuggling, forced marriage, as domestic servants, for illegal adoptions or for the removal of their organs. ECPAT-USA

reports that at least 100,000 children in the USA are sexually exploited. “Pimps market and sell children for sex—openly—at popular online classified sites. They sell them at truck stops. They sell them on streets in every city in America.” —National Center for Missing and Exploited Children)

The definition of a child varies; according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, s/he is a person below the age of 18. However, some cultures consider a person an adult after a rite of passage, which may or may not correspond to the time of puberty.

Why is this happening?

Trafficking has become the most lucrative crime business after drugs (US State Department), because the merchandise can be sold over and over again. According to UNICEF, the global market for child trafficking alone brings in over 12 billion dollars per year, with over 1-2 million child victims. Girls are especially vulnerable to the danger of being trafficked for the following reasons:

Gender Inequity: Girls are the most powerless of all vulnerable populations because of social and cultural factors that devalue women and girls. Girls often have no control over their destiny, and their lower status makes them more likely to be voluntarily sold by their families.

Poverty: Parents who voluntarily sell their children to traffickers often do so because they are living in poverty and cannot afford to feed their children, or think that it represents an opportunity for



Children at work in Cotonou's Dantokpa market, one of Benin's key commercial areas.

a better life for the child. Girls usually have fewer prospects for employment--with lower potential salary contributions--or require dowries which the family cannot afford.

Gender Imbalance: Abduction is another source of trafficked children. Countries with extreme gender imbalances have a high number of kidnappings, mostly from poor areas and from neighboring countries. Given a cultural preference for male children, families may buy a son; or given a gender ratio distortion and shortage of brides, women and girls become commodities in countries with strong preferences for male children.

Indeed, any factor that increases the supply of vulnerable people, such as natural disasters, migration, unemployment, lack of education or domestic violence, will tend to increase the incidence of trafficking in all people, including children.

Both boys and girls are trafficked for forced labor. The mineral tantalum in your cell phone may have come from an artisanal mine in Africa, dug out of the ground as coltan ore by a child. It probably financed serious conflict in the DR Congo in which child soldiers fought, died or served as sex toys for their fellow soldiers. Boys especially are in high demand for the fishing industry in Asia. After carrying heavy boxes of fish and pulling out loaded nets from dawn to dusk, seven days a week, the boys may collapse from exhaustion and be thrown overboard like broken tools.

Sex trafficking in children has many complex causes but perhaps the greatest single factor in the increasing demand is the production of pornography. Pornography is becoming more explicit, more violent



and more degrading, and the internet has made it ever more accessible to teens and young adults. In an analysis of a number of internet pornography sites, 88% depicted physical aggression, 94% of which was directed against women or children.

What Can We Do? Action!

No cultural excuses can justify the sexual exploitation of children, resulting as it does in long-lasting physical and psychological trauma, disease, drug addiction, pregnancy, malnutrition, social ostracism and death. (US Department of State: *Trafficking in Persons Report 2012*)

Trafficking in children is child slavery and a gross violation of human rights. The prostitution of children is prohibited in most countries around the world. United Nations documents such as the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* forbid the exploitative use of children for labor, armed conflict, prostitution, or pornography (Art.31) and in pornography performances and materials. (Art.34)

They urge nations to “take all... measures to prevent abduction of,

sale of, or traffic in children.” (Art. 35) That document also promotes measures that contribute to the “physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration” of the child (Art. 39), preventing re-victimization.

- Find out which countries have ratified internationally-agreed commitments designed to prevent human trafficking, protect victims and prosecute traffickers, particularly the United Nations Palermo Protocol, the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*.
- Has your country ratified the full UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*? The United States has not ratified it.

See how the factors that increase demand for trafficked persons fit into your life.

- You can check with suppliers to see if the things you buy (clothing or food) are made/gathered by child slaves.
- Hold the stores from which you purchase goods accountable for all steps of their supply chain.

Ask the manager:

- ◆ Did the cheap shrimp at your grocery come from a child slave ship in Thailand?
- ◆ Were the cocoa beans in your Easter chocolate candy picked by child slaves?
- ◆ Insist on Fair Trade or certified Slave Free merchandise.
- See if local publications which advertise adult entertainment feature child porn.
- Ask airline employees, hotel workers, policemen or taxi drivers if they have been trained to recognize the signs that children are being trafficked. Legislation that requires comprehensive Victim Identification Training for these professionals would empower them to do so.
- Intensify efforts to prosecute people who exploit children in brothels, massage parlors, strip

clubs, and in street prostitution.

- Promote sanctions against law enforcement agencies that refuse to enforce laws against trafficking and dismantle criminal networks that profit from the sale of human beings.
- Recommend more stringent sanctions on the publication or transmission of pornography in electronic or paper form.
- See if your country or state has a Safe Harbor Law that exempts children from prosecution for prostitution, provides training for those assisting victims, provides consistent guidance/monitoring by professionals and provides financing for the development of programs.
- Work for the passage of a national Safe Harbor Law and a nation-wide system of care for children.
- Publicize the illegal nature and penalties for trafficking and

promote media campaigns dealing with human rights for children.

- Provide gender-centered education and information/awareness campaigns to warn children about the dangers of trafficking and campaigns targeting males. This strikes at the demand side of the issue. (United Nations Population Fund)
- Support the provision of safe places and treatment for child victims/survivors of trafficking, as well as programs to reintegrate them into their society. As of 2012, there were fewer than 250 shelter beds for commercially exploited children in the US. (ECPAT-USA)
- Increase development aid to organizations that target the creation of legitimate income-generating possibilities for women and families with children and those that educate/empower girls.

Reflection

How do my actions contribute to the international slave trade in children?

What are the sources of our values and hope for a better world?

Scripture

- Psalm 10: 12-18—Do not forget the helpless, defend the oppressed...
- Psalm 72:4-5, 12-14—May God defend the afflicted and save the children of the needy...
- Micah 6: 6-8—God requires that you act justly, love mercy, and walk...with your God...
- Amos 5: 21-24—Let justice roll like a river...
- Proverbs 31: 8-9—Speak up for those who cannot speak, defend the poor and needy...
- Matthew 25: 34-40—Whatever you did for one of these least, you did for me...
- Luke 10: 25-37—Love for those in need...
- John 3: 19-21—People loved darkness instead of light...



Resources

Prayer Services

- ✂ **Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center: Prayer Service for an End to Human Trafficking**
www.ipjc.org/links/TraffickingPrayer.pdf
- ✂ **School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND): Prayer for an End to Trafficking**
www.csjstpaul.org/files/csjstpaul/files/JusticeDocs/AHTWG%20Prayer_Prayer%20for%20an%20End%20to%20Trafficking.pdf
- ✂ **A Heart for Justice: 72 Daily Prayer Points**
aheartforjustice.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/72DailyPrayerPoints.pdf

Informational Websites

Slavery Footprint

www.slaveryfootprint.org/survey

“13 Products Most Likely Made by Child Labor”

www.buffingtonpost.com/2010/12/18/child-labor-products_n_798601.html#s211000&title=2_Cotton

Polaris Project

polarisproject.org

Just Faith

www.justfaith.org

US Conference of Catholic Bishops

USCCB.org

Bakhita Initiative

bakhitainitiative.org

World Crafts has gifts from artisans who escaped slavery

worldcrafts.org

ECPAT International

ecpat.net

ECPAT USA

ecpatusa.org

Shared Hope

sharedhope.org

U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking is a collaborative, faith-based network that offers educational programs and materials, supports access to survivor services, and engages in legislative advocacy to eradicate modern-day slavery.