



ALLIANCE TO END HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Founded and Supported by U.S. Catholic Sisters

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Human Trafficking: Violation of Human Rights

What is Happening?

“There is a person being exploited. Someone who did not want to be used, bought or sold. Someone who just needed food, rent, someone who just didn’t have anyone else to turn to or another choice. Until we see that person as our friend, neighbor, sister, daughter, etc., it will never stop.”

-Female survivor of human trafficking from the United States

Human trafficking involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor, commercial sex act, or to harvest organs.¹ It is a criminal act in which human beings are treated as possessions to be controlled and exploited as objects. Human trafficking is the second-largest and fastest-growing criminal industry in the world. It is estimated that as many as forty-three million persons worldwide are now being held in some form of slavery, including commercial sexual exploitation, forced labor, child labor, and forced organ harvesting, producing annual profits of over \$150 billion.²

One aspect of the trafficking experience is the commodification of the trafficked person. The explicit sexual material through various media reducing the stigma of commercial sex, the normalization of putting a human being on exhibit to sell an object, consumers desiring cheaper goods; all serve to create a culture that allows for dehumanization and use of people as property or as a product. Human beings are stripped of their identity and classified as “other.” Human trafficking deprives every human being of their dignity as persons made in the image of God. Basic rights of trafficking victims, such as the right to life, security, freedom of movement, the right not to be subjected to torture or degrading treatment or punishment is violated.³

Why is this happening?

- *Why do human beings enslave other human beings?*
- *Why do human beings buy and sell other human beings like goods?*
- *How can a human being be seen as an object?*

Traffickers, like us, have been socialized to think of anyone different from me as “other,” an “object” who can be ignored or used to my advantage.³ Each evening we watch the news and see what is happening to a disembodied “other” on television. Out of a desire for even more cheap goods, we ignore supply chains and the systems that endanger or limit the life of those who made our goods. Out of fear, we build walls to keep out and exclude other human beings. This “othering” serves to exclude, devalue, and dehumanize another human being; or as Pope Francis states in *Let Us Dream*, turn “life from a gift into a product.”⁴

“Othering” shapes the views and actions of even the most well-intentioned individual. It is at the root of what allows some human beings to enslave other human beings, to sell other human beings.⁵

Traffickers take advantage of, as well as are victims of, this culture of exclusion and indifference.

What can/must be done

It is essential to recognize and acknowledge how we have all been socialized to “other” anyone different from us. As individuals, we need to “catch ourselves” whenever we find ourselves thinking of, or treating, another human being or community of human beings as “other.”

We also need to address all social systems, all “isms”, designed to treat human beings as “other.” What role do we play in supporting systems that allow the exploitation of “other?” As consumers, we benefit when people are exploited to make cheap goods. To address the demand for sex trafficking we need to examine societal views that promote sexual exploitation and objectification of certain individuals.

The COVID-19 experience has shown us how interconnected we are as a human race. The sense of shared humanity and the common good for each individual is necessary to obliterate the sense of otherness pervasive in our society today.



Scripture:

Then God said, “Let us make each person in our image, after our likeness.”

(Genesis 1:26–27)

“The seventh commandment forbids acts or enterprises that for any reason - selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian - lead to the enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit. St. Paul directed a Christian master to treat his Christian slave “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, . . . both in the flesh and in the Lord.”

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church: 2414

“I have always been distressed at the lot of those who are victims of various kinds of human trafficking. How I wish that all of us would hear God’s cry: ‘Where is your brother?’ (Gen 4:9). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labor? Let us not look the other way.”

–Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

Source Notes:

1. <https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/what-human-trafficking#:~:text=Human%20trafficking%20involves%20the%20use,labor%20or%20commercial%20sex%20act.&text=Traffickers%20use%20force%2C%20fraud%2C%20or,labor%20or%20commercial%20sexual%20exploitation>
2. <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/human-trafficking-numbers>
3. <https://combathumantrafficking.org/2018/12/human-trafficking-human-rights-violation/>
4. Pope Francis, *Let us Dream* published 2020 by Austen Ivereigh, pg. 116.
5. <https://www.traffickingmatters.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Law-Otherness-and-Human-Trafficking.pdf>

In order to protect the identity of trafficking victims, models have been used in identifiable photos.