



Slavery in the 21st Century

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Slavery is a word we associate with antiquated and deeply unjust societies, yet for the 15 to 30 million slaves living in 2011 it is a daily reality. Characterized by a denial of self-determination, these enslaved individuals are forced to work for little or no pay under the control of another person. Trafficking of persons plays a large role in modern day slavery, with 75-80% of all human trafficking victims being sold into the sex trade.¹ Other areas of exploitation include forced labor, domestic servitude and begging syndicates. Slavery exists outside the sphere of legal or social governance and the fact that this system remains part of our global economic and social structure is rarely discussed openly. Tens of millions of trafficking victims lack access to education and healthcare, live under threat of brutal beatings and suffer a broad denial of the most basic human rights.

Trafficking of persons is a complex issue, yet often involves vulnerable people being coerced from 'source countries' to 'destination countries' with the promise of regular employment and a better life. 'Source countries' are generally economically depressed regions, particularly areas in Eastern Europe and Asia.

The globalization of world markets, movement and economies has led to an increasingly streamlined system of slavery. The sex trafficking that targets vulnerable people, particularly women and girls from poor areas, seeks to fuel and fill demand in wealthy nations. These slaves are often promised employment in cafes or businesses, and are then broken physically and psychologically in order to make a profit for their 'owner'. It is an incredibly violent existence, yet the clients who visit brothels and sex workers support the human traffickers by paying for a service which harms and entraps. Raising awareness of this largely hidden issue is the first step in addressing the problem, as our knowledge and choices are incredibly powerful.

These choices extend to seemingly innocuous products we may purchase every day. Slavery and human trafficking play an invisible role in the processing of raw materials in many goods, from clothing to coffee, at the level of production which is far removed from anything consumers see first-hand. A key example is the cocoa industry. Child labour, indentured service, human trafficking and slavery all remain part of cocoa production in many east African nations, particularly the Ivory Coast. Workers, including children, are taken from their homes and families and set to work to fulfill high quotas and are punished with violence and cruelty.

While policies and laws have been created to address this problem, they have not gone far enough. *The Harkin-Engel Protocol* was signed in the United States in 2001 with the aim to end child labour in the cocoa industry. However, as this Protocol commemorates its tenth anniversary, it has not achieved its most basic aims and children are still working in terrible conditions. Multinational companies benefit from interconnected markets, and while some have opted to source fair trade raw materials and set long term performance goals, many of the largest companies have not. This includes Hershey's, the largest producer of chocolate in the United States. It is key to know that the products we consume come from a globalised marketplace and that our choices affect people millions of miles away. Buying certified fair trade products when available is an important step in asserting the value of human life, dignity and freedom.

The UN NGO community is currently evaluating the next steps in the global fight against the amorphous trade in human beings. Slavery and trafficking are explicitly addressed in the UN Charter of Human Rights and the NGO community is guided by the 'Three Ps' in its work combating trafficking: Prevent, Protect, Prosecute. NGOs worldwide have created and worked on various initiatives to practically impact the trafficking of persons trade. By partnering with airlines and hotels, NGOs are teaching staff key ways in which to identify people who may be being trafficked. These lessons include being aware of people who seem vulnerable and who may have someone speaking consistently on their behalf. Another initiative is the Blue Heart Campaign, a visible symbol of solidarity for those forced into slavery and an acknowledgment of the reality of slavery and human trafficking in our society, similar to the AIDs Red Ribbon campaign in its aim to raise awareness and remove social stigma.

Worldwide, governments are increasingly paying attention to slavery and human trafficking. The TIP (Trafficking In Persons) Report has been an important step, as it openly evaluates the progress made by countries in addressing and eradicating the practice of trafficking. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated when releasing the 2011 TIP: 'Every year, we come together to release this report, to take stock of our progress, to make suggestions, and to

¹ Aronowitz, Alexis A. 2009. *Human Trafficking, Human Misery: The Global Trade in Human Beings*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group

refine our methods. Today, we are releasing a new report that ranks 184 countries, including (the United States).² Bringing these issues into the light, into legal frameworks and into the public consciousness is the only way to end the global slave trade and change the lives of the millions of people living without freedom.

Visit these valuable resources to learn more about slavery, human trafficking and what you can do

A wonderful interactive website where you can see how many slaves play a role in producing the products you consume:

<http://slaveryfootprint.org/>

Learn more about which multinational companies are working towards fair-trade cocoa production:

<http://www.raisethebarhershey.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/HersheyReport2011.pdf>

Watch this confronting yet very real video representation of the reality of human trafficking and the sex trade:

http://www.youtube.com/verify_age?next_url=http%3A//www.youtube.com/watch%3Fv%3DBdW05BC4emw

Mary Ward Social Centre works on programs to combat human trafficking in northern India. Read more about these initiatives: http://www.ibvm.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=499:loreto-sisters-combat-human-trafficking&catid=136:the-un-ngos&Itemid=181

At the United Nations, human trafficking comes under the umbrella of the Office of Drugs and Crime. Learn more:

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/faqs.html>

The Palermo Protocol is the UN's main document on anti-trafficking. Read the full text:

http://www.uncjin.org/Documents/Conventions/dcatoc/final_documents_2/convention_%20traff_eng.pdf

Comprehensive web resource detail how you can get involved in campaigns to end human trafficking and slavery:

<http://www.humantrafficking.org/>



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² <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2011/index.htm>