

## **Sex Trafficking as Modern Slavery**

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Sex trafficking takes place in Milwaukee and Mumbai. Girls, women, and even boys are kidnapped, coerced, or seduced into prostitution. Grown men rape them. Drug them. And discard them.

Sex trafficking is a multi-billion dollar global enterprise involving millions of people. Most victims are females of color – Asian, African, African American, and Latina. According to Federal law, human trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person to perform labor or a commercial sex act through force, fraud, or coercion.

Any commercial sex act performed by a person under age 18 is considered human trafficking, regardless of whether force, fraud, or coercion is involved. So prevalent, Laurel Bellows, of The American Bar Association, made abolishing human trafficking a focus of her presidency.

Human traffickers move like traffickers of guns and drugs. Human beings are packed in vans and container cars, moved overland, or shipped by sea. Runaway children are prime targets. In America, some runaway children are taken by traffickers less than twenty-four hours after leaving home.

Child sex tourism is big business. People travel worldwide to engage in sexual acts with minors, according to ECPAT, a global network working for the elimination of child prostitution, child pornography and trafficking of children. In Texas and Thailand, girls are stripped of their humanity.

Instead of plastic dolls or inanimate toys, live human beings are used as sexual receptacles. In Nepal, girls are being sold to traffickers by their impoverished parents. In New Mexico, parents sell children for drugs. Virgins are valuable. Traffickers offer \$200, more than three years' income in Asian villages.

Virgins are also prized by traffickers in America. Men in Seattle and South Africa pay substantially more to rape an innocent girl and boy; some men with AIDS believe sex with a virgin will cure them. Both women and men train children in “the sex trade.” Young people, lost and confused, feeling betrayed by society, cling to the abuser as a new family.

In Philadelphia, men find girls running from abusive homes and play on their youthful insecurities or need for fatherly attention. In Poland, and other parts of Eastern Europe, young women follow men with promises of employment, since not all employment contracts are false. Too late they discover a fate of prostitution or domestic work and rape.

Ruined – that is the lie. Traffickers haunt victims with lies of rejection by family and friends. Lies the brothel, strip club, fake massage parlor, truck stop, bar or street life is their only destiny and pimps their only family. Like child soldiers, trafficked children may defend their kidnappers.

Traffickers are now family. But, from Minneapolis to Memphis, only trafficked victims carry criminal charges for prostitution, not their traffickers. Girls take the jail sentence. Girls on Chicago streets, just like Falkland Road in Mumbai, India, bear the sexually transmitted diseases, abortions, and beatings. Their veins carry the drugs to dull the emotional pain.

Prosecutors now understand that child prostitutes are victims of statutory rape. Juvenile detention facilities are beginning to recognize trafficked children. Schools and hospitals are becoming aware of the signs of a sexually abused or trafficked child.

Trafficked children are fearful, based on the Polaris Project, an organization working to end sex slavery. They rarely have personal identification. Bruised, tired, and sexually suggestive, they may be malnourished and frequently absent. They speak little of home or family. Brainwashed, most might refuse assistance or programs which take them away from prostitution, making it difficult for trained social workers, caregivers, prosecutors, and judges – but not impossible.

Traffickers are criminals. The F.B.I. and local police are targeting traffickers. Sex traffickers can be charged with kidnapping, rape, and assault, with enhanced sentences for trafficking. Every State, except Wyoming, and 116 countries make trafficking a crime. Stricter Federal legislation is coming.

On February 12, the U.S. Senate passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) as an amendment to the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Reauthorization is needed to maintain VAWA and thus TVPRA. VAWA must now pass the House of Representatives. Thousands of innocent lives are at stake.

TVPRA and VAWA will provide needed funding; more Federal and State resources, and legal protections required to battle a multinational demon. Yet, VAWA may be stalled in a

political quagmire within the Republican-controlled House. Without VAWA, there is no Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act.

History marks this year as the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Slavery, then, involved the rape of African girls. Profit, then, drove men to strip legions of human beings of their humanity. Slavery, then, was a global enterprise. Yet, American slavery was defeated.

Today, abolitionists are needed in politics as well as social work, law and law enforcement, the arts, and schools across the globe, working to defeat sex slavery. Now, as it was with American slavery, history will be the judge.

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