

Does Slavery Still Exist?

By Janna Lipman

Growing up in the Bethel family, I learned a lot about working in the community to help others. My life and career have led me to travel and work around the world in post-conflict nations and underdeveloped countries. With these opportunities I have had the pleasure to learn about different cultures: the good and unfortunately also the bad such as slavery. While completing my Masters Degree in Peace Operations Policy at George Mason University, I enrolled in several courses about human trafficking and learned that slavery exists throughout the world, even in the US and in the DC metro area. It was during my time at graduate school that I also traveled to Albania for several months to research child slavery and interview children to gain their perspective on child begging.

Many of you may have heard me speak on these issues at Fellowship Hour or other events such as Bethel Movie Nights. It has now become a passion of mine to see how I can help to eradicate slavery through educating others about this issue. In 2011, a classmate and I established a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, Anka Rising (www.ankarising.org), to specifically work with the private sector to educate them on the issues of modern-day slavery and how they can get involved in developing anti-modern-day slavery corporate policies within their organizations.

What is modern-day slavery or more commonly termed “human trafficking”?

Human trafficking is slavery. The U.S. Department of State in their annual *Trafficking in Persons Report*, as well as experts in the field, use the terms slavery or “modern-day slavery” to encompass all forms of trafficking. It has taken on different forms from sex trafficking to labor trafficking. Slave “owners” now have the ability to use different means of technology to provide slaves to people and organizations and the number of people enslaved and profits earned by traffickers is constantly growing. The term human trafficking is used to speak to the movement of people or for legal terms since this is how it is defined in US federal and state laws. Both terms, slavery and human trafficking are defined to include **the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability and they cannot walk away**. It is important to remember that those enslaved cannot walk away from those that have imprisoned them. There are many reasons why victims cannot walk away including the fact that they do not have access to their passports, they are mentally traumatized, or they have been beaten badly enough that physically they cannot walk away.

When is Human Trafficking Awareness Month?

Several years ago, President Obama declared January “Human Trafficking Awareness Month” to bring to light the issues and the victims of slavery. Organizations and governments around the world organize events and conferences to educate as many people as possible about slavery. In September 2012, President Obama addressed an audience at the Clinton Global Initiative Annual Meeting and stated:

“It ought to concern every person, because it’s a debasement of our common humanity. It ought to concern every community, because it tears at the social fabric. It ought to concern every business, because it distorts markets. It ought to concern every nation,

because it endangers public health and fuels violence and organized crime. I'm talking about the injustice, the outrage, of human trafficking, which must be called by its true name—modern slavery."

September 2012 also celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation declaring all mankind "free." Yet there are still over 21 million people enslaved around the world today bringing slave owners approximately \$32 billion dollars in revenue per year. Women, children, and men are enslaved in coffee plantations, massage parlors, tomato farms, construction sites, brick factories, sports equipment factories, nightclubs, cocoa farms, armed conflicts, garment factories, sweatshops and more. About 80% of all slaves are women and 50% children. These are a few of the statistics that define slavery. These numbers represent the victims that need the advocates, the help, and the hope.

What is the UCC doing?

In January 2012, the UCC set up a call for churches to observe "Human Trafficking Awareness Day" on January 11 and provided educational materials online for those interested in learning more (<http://www.ucc.org/justice/human-rights/human-trafficking.html>). Additionally, in 2008, the Governing Board of the National Council of Churches, USA, approved a "Resolution on Human Trafficking" which calls upon the member communions of the NCC to educate their congregations and advocate for policies that will bring an end to human trafficking, also known as trafficking in persons. This resolution calls upon the United Church of Christ and its congregations to be part of this education and advocacy effort and was approved to be sent to the General Synod (<http://www.ucc.org/synod/resolutions/gs27/human-traffickingpdf>).

What can YOU do?

There are many ways that individuals, organizations, and communities can get involved. One simple way is to reach out to your Congressperson to let them know this is an important issue they need to get involved. At this time, the US Federal law, The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) has not been reauthorized by the Senate. Many states, including Virginia, do not have robust state laws that specifically get to the heart of the issue but focus on other ways such as racketeering to convict traffickers of their crimes. For more information on the laws by state, visit <http://www.polarisproject.org/resources/state-and-federal-laws>. There are also many petitions that individuals can sign focused on legislation and other slavery advocacy issues through Change.org and others.

You can educate yourself, your employer, your friends about the issues and determine how you can be involved in eradicating slavery. As you learn about modern-day slavery and think you might have observed someone who is a victim of slavery, there is the National Human Trafficking Resource Center or hotline you can call to report: 1.888.3737.888.

And of course, you can donate (tax deductible) to my organization, Anka Rising, or others that provide assistance to victims and other areas focused on stopping modern-day slavery. Just the other day, there was an article in the *Washington Times* that provides information on how to research organizations

focused on slavery (<http://communities.washingtontimes.com/neighborhood/speaking-out/2012/dec/27/human-trafficking-and-other-causes-donate-wisely-d/>).

There are many resources, i.e. organizations, papers, articles, movies, TV shows, documentaries, available that tell the story of slavery through the victims and advocates. If you are interested in learning more, please feel free to contact me (jmlipman@hotmail.com).