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HUMAN SLAVERY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Child Slavery

The trusting, innocent, dependent nature of children, coupled with their lack of worldly experience, make them especially vulnerable to entrapment in slavery.¹ However, estimating the extent of child slavery is quite difficult not just because the practice is clandestine but also because the children are silenced by their own fear and survival needs [Office of the High Commissioner, no date, p.1].

Worldwide there were 352 million children aged 5 to 17 engaged in some form of economic activity in 2000, including work that is permissible child labor. Among those children there were 171 million at work in hazardous circumstances. Another 8.4 million children were involved in "the unconditional worst forms of child labor" including 5.7 million in forced and bonded labor, 1.8 million in prostitution and pornography, 0.6 million in illicit activities, and 0.3 million in armed conflict [ILO 2003, pp.13-14; UNICEF 2002a, p. 8]. Extensive research between 1999 and 2001 by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers covering 180 countries and territories revealed that both boys and girls are counted among the 0.3 million fighting in more than 30 countries, and hundreds of thousands of other children have been recruited into regular and para-military service, militia and other armed groups. The youngest child soldier was a seven year old [Coalition 2001, p.1].

A separate estimate (to avoid the problem of double-counting) places the number of children who are trafficked for child labor at 1.2 million [ILO 2003, p.14]. In its *State of the World's Children* report for 2002 UNICEF says that it is

gravely concerned at the significant and increasing international traffic in children for the purpose of the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography [and] *deeply concerned* at the widespread and continuing practice of sex tourism, to which children are especially vulnerable as it directly promotes the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography [UNICEF 2002b, p.64; emphases in original].

In Ghana ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking in Children) estimates put the number of girls, usually under age 10, who become the

¹ Slavery is "the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised" [League of Nations 1926, pp.1-2].

property of fetish priests for sexual and labor services in a religious atonement practice known as Trokosi at 4,500 [ECPAT, no date, p.3]. An estimated 1 million girls work as maids in the Philippines for very low pay and long hours [Anti-Slavery International, no date, p.15]. In Peru roughly one-half of the estimated 1.0 million adult prostitutes are actually children using false identity papers; in the United States the number of child prostitutes is put at 100,000 [Beyer 1996, p.32].

Adult Slavery

Taking Bales' conservative estimate of contemporary slavery worldwide at 27 million [Bales 1999, p.8] and removing the number of enslaved children as estimated by the ILO produce a very crude estimate of 10 million adults in slavery. According to Bales, they work in agriculture, brick making, mining or quarrying, prostitution, gem working and jewelry making, cloth and carpet making, and domestic services. In addition, slaves clear forests, make charcoal, and work in shops. In the United States farm workers have been locked inside barracks and have labored in the fields under armed guards; enslaved women from Thailand and the Philippines have been freed from brothels in New York, Los Angeles, and Seattle [Bales 1999, pp.1-33, 200].

The United Nations in 2000 reported that there were upwards of 200 million migrants worldwide of whom approximately 15 million were smuggled into the country where they presently reside [cited by Richards 2001, p.19]. In 2001 between 0.7 and 4.0 million men, women, and children were bought, sold, transported, and held against their will in a form of slavery that is known as "trafficking." [U.S. Department of State 2002, p.1]. Trafficking is the

recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons, by means of 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 or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of the person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation [which includes] ... prostitution ... or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or [similar] practices ... servitude or removal of organs [U.N. General Assembly 2001, p.32].

Smuggling is the

procurement ... to obtain ... a financial or other material benefit, of illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or permanent resident [U.N. General Assembly 2001, p.41].

An estimated 0.5 million women are trafficked into western Europe every year [UNICEF 2002c, p.4]. About 50,000 women and children are trafficked in the United States every year [Anti-Slavery International 2002, p.124] for the purpose of prostitution, stripping/sexual touching, sweated labor, agricultural slave labor, domestic and other forms of servitude [Richard 2000, p.50]. The annual profits derived from trafficking range from \$3 to \$10 billion [Schloenhardt 1999, p.23].

Why Slavery Persists

There are two sets of reasons as to why slavery persists. On the part of the person enslaved there is a material need grounded in the unrelieved poverty and dearth of opportunities of that person's pre-enslavement circumstances, though the linkage between poverty and slavery is neither complete nor direct [see, for example, U.S. Department of State 2002, pp.1-2; ILO 2001, p.101; ILO 2002, p.xii; Strandberg 1999, p.7]. Unmet need pushes that person -- if a child, his/her family or guardian may use that unmet need to push him/her -- into labor that through deception, force, and violence is exploited, where the poverty continues and a form of bondage may be imposed. Additionally, there is a fundamental human need for work as such that meets the need for belonging and the need to engage in work that is challenging and creative, allowing that human being to develop his/her full potential as a person [David 2000, p.3]. The need to belong can be denied effectively by several means including language barrier, physical confinement, and passport seizure. The need for creative work opportunities makes the innocent and naive vulnerable to being duped and deceived by the promises of the agents of slavery [Ryf 2002, pp.49-51]. For example, the promise of marriage may entrap a girl into forced prostitution; the enticement of learning a skill or trade may ensnare a boy into domestic servitude [U.S. Department of State 2002, p.1].

On the part of the person who enslaves, Bales reports that in Pakistan, India, Mauritania, and Brazil nearly every slaveholder he met and interviewed regarded himself as a businessman. Indeed these agents of slavery were family men and pillars of the community [Bales 2002, p.4]. This objectification of human beings is best described in the language routinely used to characterize the prostitute: "sex object." Objectification, however, is even more common than what is represented by the practice of human enslavement. Millions of other humans are reduced to objects as John Paul warns in *Evangelium Vitae* [p.14] through murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, willful self-destruction, mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself, subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, disgraceful working conditions.

Emancipation and Rehabilitation

Emancipating and rehabilitating enslaved children and adults begin with the recognition that slavery today is a [U.N. General Assembly 2001, pp. 32, 41] worldwide human tragedy that ultimately reduces to one human being treating another as an exploitable property rather than a human person. Ryf asserts that governments and law enforcement agencies worldwide are contributing to the spread of trafficking due to a failure to recognize the problem, to outlaw the practice, and to appropriate the necessary funds to enforce anti-trafficking laws. In the United States, \$95 million was appropriated for 2001-2002 to combat trafficking but Ryf states that even these resources may not reduce world trafficking to any significant degree [Ryf 2002, pp. 69-70]. Bales asserts that programs of emancipation and rehabilitation are still in their infancy and no systematic evaluation is presently available. A further complication is that there has been no in-depth social science study of the relationship between the master and the slave [Bales 2002, p. 5].

Anti-Slavery International has advanced 45 recommendations relating to government responsibilities in dealing with trafficking. Five of those recommendations are enumerated below in order to suggest the scope of governmental action required to reduce trafficking. First, persons who have been trafficked should not be prosecuted for acts such as prostitution that were performed while they were being trafficked. Second, persons who have been trafficked should be informed of their right to asylum and be granted asylum whenever appropriate. Third, the state should provide shelters for persons who have been trafficked. Fourth, laws should be enacted that allow confiscation of the assets of traffickers and use of the proceeds of the liquidated assets as compensation for persons who have been trafficked. Fifth, the state should not force the return of a trafficked person to his/her country of origin when there is evidence that the person may be subject to discrimination, stigmatization, or reprisal [Anti-Slavery International 2002, pp. 5-12].

The ILO recommends microfinance and microcredit arrangements that target families at risk of falling into enslavement and that focus especially on women who are key to reducing the number of children who are trafficked. Stronger preventive labor inspection measures, the ILO argues, likely contribute to the elimination of forced labor [ILO 2001, pp. x, 102].

ECPAT has issued a report with numerous recommended actions to protect children. Three have been selected for their specificity. First, the state should provide a guardian *ad litem* to assist a child who is a witness in criminal proceedings that involve allegations of sexual exploitation of children. Second, telephone help lines should be made available to children seeking assistance because they have been abused or exploited. Third, an ombudsman, institution, or agency should be appointed to hear and act on complaints from children [ECPAT 1996, pp. 15, 18, 22].

The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights has prepared a lengthy list of recommendations of which four are enumerated below. First, the state should review its legislation regarding use of the Internet for the purpose of trafficking, prostitution and sexual exploitation of women and children and enact new legislation as required to prevent such abuses. Second, the state should implement measures to prevent and sanction the confiscation of the passports of migrant workers. Third, no girl of primary school age should be employed as a domestic. Fourth, in depth investigations should be conducted to determine the role of corruption and international debt in fostering slavery [Office of the High Commissioner 1999, pp. 3-4].

Slavery in the end is rooted in a culture of death and despair. It will persist as long as humankind clings to those cultural values. It will not be wiped out until humankind embraces the counter-cultural values of life and hope.

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