

World Day Against Human Trafficking

WORLD DAY AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS



Human trafficking is “a form of slavery, a crime against humanity, a grave violation of human rights, and an atrocious scourge”
(Pope Francis)

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In recent weeks, news services across the globe carried the story of the deaths of nine people crammed, with up to a hundred others, in the back of a trailer parked in above century heat in Texas. While capturing the headlines this was by no means an unusual occurrence in countries across Europe and the Americas. Modern day slavery is no respecter of human lives or rights.

Human trafficking is a multi-billion-dollar industry, second only to the drug trade in financial gain and is estimated to involve around 21 million people. It is an industry which feeds off poverty, lack of education and desperation. No country is immune from the inroads of slavery - some send

slaves around the world and others receive, but all are involved. Unscrupulous traffickers and employers, in search of quick money, lure impoverished girls from the mountains of Asia with offers of city employment and transport them to brothels all over the world. Restaurant owners in Australia and the United States promise their far flung relatives lucrative jobs in kitchens and dining rooms, seize their passports, pay them nothing and force them to work for 18 hours a day. Convenience stores in Western countries offer struggling students part time work, coerce them into them into working in excess of their visa requirements and pay them a pittance. Shipping companies promise exciting job opportunities on factory ships and then keep men for months on end in appalling work conditions with little or no pay.

The UN General Assembly in 2000 signed on to the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*. This was a significant milestone in international efforts to stop the trade in people. While most countries signed on to the protocol the reality is that few criminals are caught and fewer are convicted. In 2013, the United Nations General Assembly designated July 30 as the World Day against Trafficking in Persons. It was deemed that such a day was necessary to “raise enduring awareness of the situation of victims of human trafficking and for the promotion and protection of their rights.” Recent meetings at the UN revealed the vulnerability of Indigenous people to trafficking and the widespread exploitation of women domestic workers. Perhaps the most alarming development in recent times is the enslavement of women and children fleeing conflict. Massive migratory movements lend themselves to the abduction of children and the exploitation of women desperate to care for their families. There is, in many cases, an alarming merger between smugglers and traffickers.

Sometimes trafficking can seem to be quite removed from our daily lives until we consider that what we wear, what we eat and our entertainment and relaxation are intertwined with trafficking. The nimble fingers of small children sew the footballs and basketballs of our sports fields, impoverished women in appalling and dangerous working conditions make our clothes, while guest workers, often brutally treated and exploited, pick the fruit and vegetables which daily grace our tables. If we are to take a responsible approach to the issue of trafficking it is up to each one of us to check where our clothes, our food, our sports equipment comes from. Pope Francis called human trafficking “a form of slavery, a crime against humanity, a grave violation of human rights, and an atrocious scourge” and urged all of us to take a stand against this evil which denigrates and destroys so many people, including millions of children.

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