

2007: The Year of Abolition

The Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons



Kay Cherush for the U.S. State Department

The drawing is a self-portrait by a 15-year-old trafficking victim. One of nine siblings in an impoverished and abusive family, "Kala" ran away from home and was sold into a brothel in India, where she was subjected to unspeakable brutality. On hearing that she was going to be trafficked to the Persian Gulf, she managed to escape. With the help of a passerby, she told her story to the police. In spite of threats, she filed a complaint against the brothel keeper and her protectors in court, leading to their conviction and incarceration. Kala now lives at a Catholic shelter for rescued girls. Her dream is to become a social worker to help "those who are trapped in evil."

The United Nations has adopted a resolution to commemorate, in 2007, the outlawing of slavery by the British Parliament in 1807. March 25, 2007, has been set aside as the International Day for the Commemoration of the Two-Hundredth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

While the slave trade of the 19th century was state-sanctioned and focused on race, 200 years later a modern slave trade exists. Largely an illegal, global phenomenon, modern-day slavery is fueled not by race, but primarily by commercial gain.

For example, U.S. federal and local law officials recently raided nearly a dozen brothels disguised as acupuncture clinics, health spas, and massage parlors in half a dozen U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Altogether, the raids resulted in 31 arrests on charges of trafficking in persons and the rescue of more than 70 suspected sex slaves, who were sheltered and provided food, counseling, and health care.

Most Americans are surprised to find that slavery still exists in the United States, let alone the rest of the world. According to U.S. government estimates, between 600,000 and 800,000 men, women, and children are trafficked across international borders each year. Millions more are forced, duped, or coerced into slavery within their own borders.

The Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP) of the U.S. Department of State was created to advance a 21st-century abolitionist movement against slavery, emphasizing the three "P's": prosecuting traffickers, protecting and assisting victims, and preventing trafficking from occurring or continuing. Human trafficking deprives people of their human rights and freedoms, which is the most prominent reason that the U.S. government is working to confront this despicable practice. The TIP office is the U.S. government's coordinating center for antislavery activities by some 12 federal departments and agencies.



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A student at Benin University in Benin City, Nigeria, walks past a billboard on the university campus encouraging young women to fight against prostitution and human trafficking. Nigerian authorities estimate that thousands of people are trafficked every year—often to provide workers for the European sex industry—but only a small proportion of cases are reported.

Human Trafficking Defined

By definition, human trafficking involves force, fraud, or coercion—legal terms that cover intimidation, kidnapping, beatings, rape, deceit, abandonment, and murder. Some victims are slaves in factories and farms. Others—primarily women and girls—are slaves in brothels in cities around the world. Still others are held in domestic servitude. Children are kidnapped as child soldiers, forced to become street beggars, or lured and abused as slaves to an underground industry known as child sex tourism.

Victims obtained from a foreign country are often lured by deceptive schemes. They usually arrive indebted to their handlers, seldom know where they are, rarely speak the local language, and have no one to turn to after the traffickers seize their passports and documentation.

Under the control of the traffickers, victims are subjected to overwhelming physical and mental pressures. Confined by beatings and threats against their families back home, trafficking victims surrender their dignity to poor living conditions and long hours in order to enrich their captors.

Human trafficking has also become a multidimensional threat. It is a global health risk, profoundly harming

individual victims and facilitating the transmission of diseases, including HIV/AIDS. And it is a threat to the safety and security of nations because it undermines the rule of law. Slavery goes hand-in-hand with corruption, document forgery, criminal networks, money laundering, and lawlessness.

The Annual Trafficking in Persons Report

In response, the Bush administration has spent more than \$400 million in international anti-trafficking assistance. Meanwhile, the Department of State issues an annual *Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report* to expose the problems in each country. A separate report is issued on the United States.

The *TIP Report* is the most comprehensive worldwide report on the efforts of governments to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons. A country-by-country assessment of the international effort to combat human trafficking by prosecuting perpetrators, protecting their victims, and working to prevent future trafficking crimes, its findings have raised global awareness and encouraged countries to take effective actions to counter human trafficking.

At the top of the report's tiered rankings are those governments that meet minimum standards for prosecution, protection, and prevention. Languishing at the other end of the report are "Tier 3" countries, whose governments face possible U.S. revocation of non-humanitarian, non-trade-related assistance for failing to comply with even the minimum standards for the elimination of modern-day slavery.

The report has steadily increased its country assessment total each year—from 124 governments reviewed in 2003 to 158 countries assessed in the 2006 *TIP Report*. Annual release of the report has also generated increasing media coverage, helping raise global consciousness of the existence and widespread problem of modern-day slavery.

Today, the *TIP Report* is the essential reference for global benchmarks that challenge all governments to join the 21st-century abolitionist movement. The annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* serves as the primary



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Escaping desperate conditions of forced labor and political repression at home, these Burmese laborers look to commercial fishing in Thailand as a way to a better life. Like illegal or marginalized immigrants everywhere, they are prey to unscrupulous traffickers who sell them to greedy ship captains and exploiters.

diplomatic tool through which the U.S. government encourages partnership and increased determination in the fight against forced labor, sexual exploitation, and modern-day slavery.

Worldwide, that effort has paid off: Anti-trafficking convictions worldwide increased from several hundred in 2001 to more than 4,700 in 2005—an increase from about 3,000 the year before. That increase was especially dramatic among countries in Africa (from 29 TIP convictions in 2004 to 58 in 2005) and among East Asian and Pacific nations (from 348 TIP convictions in 2004 to 2,347 in 2005).

Even the threat of sanctions has proved to be a powerful prod when coupled with increased public awareness. All over the world, the number of trafficking convictions and trafficking shelters is rising. Still, every country—even the United States—can and must do more to thwart forced labor and domestic servitude, sexual slavery, and child sex tourism.

Interagency Work Against Trafficking

In 2001, the president established a cabinet-level task force to coordinate federal efforts to combat human trafficking. The President's Interagency Task Force (PITF) is chaired by the secretary of state and meets at least once a year. In 2003, a senior working-level group, the Senior Policy Operating Group (SPOG), was created to follow up on PITF initiatives and to implement U.S. government anti-trafficking policies and guidelines. The SPOG meets quarterly.

Members of the PITF and SPOG include the Departments of State, Justice, Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Defense, together with the

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Office of Management and Budget, and the Office of the Directorate of National Intelligence. The National Security Council also regularly participates. Most recently, the Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and the Department of Education have participated.

The year 2007 marks the bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade in the British colonies. Two hundred years later, the United States is engaging the world to end the modern-day slave trade—determined to settle for nothing short of the abolition of this terrible international crime. As President Bush has said: “No one is fit to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave.” ■

<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/>