



Rotarians against Child Slavery – Issue 3



“The mass movement against slavery will only work if every single supporter performs simple acts of preventative abolition” (“A Crime so Monstrous” – E. Benjamin Skinner)

The fledgling RAG.... At the time of writing, this Group has 252 members from 27 countries. We are aiming for at least 1000 members. So with that objective in mind, please encourage your Rotarians friends to join the Group by directing them to the website, ie (www.racsrag.org). Also, I would be grateful if existing members (who have not already done so) would complete the “membership application form” which is included on the website.

This Newsletter’s aims.....The main aims of this particular edition are to highlight an aspect of slavery which is regarded as one of the fastest growing forms of organised crime, ie “human trafficking”, to indicate how complicit most of us are in maintaining this evil practice and to suggest how we can help to redress the situation in a few simple ways.

Human trafficking I am obliged to Harry Payne (a RACS member) who sent me a copy of Steve Chalke’s book (Stop the Traffik) which provides a useful definition of the activity. Human trafficking (which used to be known as “*the slave trade*”) is defined as “*the dislocation of someone by deception or coercion for exploitation, through forced prostitution, forced labour, or other forms of slavery*”. I do recommend members to read Steve Chalke’s very readable book which includes an interesting chapter written by Cherie Blair, contains real life stories of children trafficked and highlights the work of the anti-slavery organisation which he founded. This organisation is called “Stop the Traffik” (www.stopthetraffic.org).

The Slave Trade is illegal....Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states “*no one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms*”. Yet in spite of the efforts of governments, the illegal practice is on the increase and there are no boundaries. Almost every country in the world is affected, either as a source, transit or destination for victims. At any one time, it is estimated that over 2.5 million (mostly children) are recruited, entrapped, transported and exploited to work in a wide range of industries, crafts and “entertainments”, which according to UNICEF generates between 10 and 12 billion US dollars each year.

The perception in the West.....Most of my friends believe that trafficking is a foreign problem. This is not true. The UK as well as the USA are particular hotspots of trafficking activity. The US State Department estimates that between 14,500 to 17,500 foreign nationals (mostly children) are trafficked each year into the United States from at least 35 countries.

Trafficking in the UK...Government research shows that there are an estimated 4,000 victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in the UK at any one time. On 14th August 2009, an article appeared in the Guardian newspapers entitled “*Britons may be aiding child trafficking*”. The article was based on a report by a children’s rights organisation (ECPAT UK) which pointed out that people who buy pirate DVDs and roses from street vendors, smoke home grown cannabis, give money to child beggars and use prostitutes may be supporting “*modern day slave trade*”. According to the report children are trafficked into the UK every day, across big cities and small towns. They have their identities removed, they are raped, beaten and forced to work in deplorable conditions. Apparently the UK is the hub for an international trafficking trade in children from 52 nations, each year.

We are complicit in this tradeMost of us unknowingly support slavery. Our purchases feed the black market of human trafficking. We buy a wide range of goods, from chocolate bars to cars, that include ingredients or components from the hands of slave labour and we do it in the proud name of frugality. We are continually seeking a cheap deal, and we boast about it when we find one. Frugality is a virtue, especially in a world of rampant consumerism, but sometimes we sacrifice more than we bargain for in a transaction. Very often we do not want to know why we are able to get such bargains. The problem is, slavery in all its forms thrives on our bargain shopping. It is the cheap labour provided by slaves that makes it possible for us to purchase many everyday goods at low prices.

Can we stop the practice ?Today Rotarians have a choice. We can despair that exploitation is an age-old problem, that human nature never changes, that in any case slavery is a problem for government – and then do nothing. Or we can remember the tenets

of the 4-Way Test, Part 2 of the Objects of Rotary and Rotary's Code of Policies in relation to the rights of children - and then do our utmost to undermine the practice of "trafficking". We can do this because we are consumers and as such have considerable power. If we choose to, we can use that power to end slavery in all its forms. But to achieve this aim, we need to understand the prime motive of the slaver.

The main aim of the traffickers.....is to make a profit in whatever ventures they are involved in. To achieve their aim, they will use any means whatsoever to protect their lucrative businesses. However, they will walk away if the venture stops making money. So putting pressure on these profits is a key strategy in the fight to eliminate trafficking.

Putting pressure on slavers' profits...We can do this individually, but our efforts will be more effective if we act together as a Rotary Club or District. Below are a few suggestions as to how we can use our consumer power to advantage:-

a) Only buy commodities which you know have not been made by slave labour. For most products it is very difficult to tell whether or not slavery has been involved somewhere along the production process. However, for certain goods, their origins are comparatively easy to trace. This would apply to certain types of cigarettes (beedies), jewellery, fireworks, carpets and rugs. Here we can take direct action. For example, when buying a carpet or a rug, we need to look out for the Rugmark label (see photo below). Rugmark is an international charity which inspects and licenses carpet looms in India, Nepal and Pakistan. When carpet makers apply for a Rugmark licence, they promise not to employ children under 14 years, undertake to pay adult weavers a minimum wage and promise to allow inspection at any time. Companies that import Rugmark carpets in Europe and America, pay at least 1% of the wholesale price of the carpet to Rugmark. This money pays for the inspection process, schools and rehabilitation programmes for children who have been freed from slavery in the carpet industry. For more information on Rugmark, please visit their website (www.rugmark.org).

b) When shopping first always consider purchasing fair trade certified goods. This is the best way to ensure that we are not contributing to the funds of slavers. Consumer pressure for more fairly traded goods means that their availability is increasing each year. For example, in the UK, the Fairtrade Foundation (www.fairtrade.org.uk) has licensed over 3,000 fair trade certified products for sale through

retail and catering outlets in the UK. Fair traded goods empower vulnerable people, advance social justice, guarantee a fair wage and safe working conditions to producers and ensures no child or sweatshop labour was used to make the items. Fair trade sales catalogues will usually give us information about the source of the goods offered, eg see Traidcraft catalogues. (www.traidcraft.co.uk).

c) Rotary Clubs could adopt the practice of writing to retailers to ask them for a copy of their purchasing policy. This should, for example, indicate whether or not a company conducts social and ethical audits of their suppliers to highlight cases of unethical practices. The simple act of writing a letter of enquiry is a signal to the retailer that local Rotarians members do care about the source of their products.

d) As an indication of your club's support for anti-slavery measures, ask your venue's proprietors to serve only fair trade food and drink. Such a request could be the catalyst for an overall change of purchasing policy by your venue's owners.

e) Consider investing monies in funding organisations like "Shared Interest" which specialise in helping to finance fair trade cooperatives in the developing world. This financial help is particularly important because it ensures that family based cooperatives are kept at arms length from unscrupulous slavers disguised as benevolent benefactors.



Conclusions.....Just over 200 years ago in England, Thomas Clarkson helped to organise a 300,000 strong boycott of slave-harvested sugar in the first known example of consumer protest. The protest was so successful that retailers previously selling sugar tainted by slavery, were quickly sourcing alternative supplies. The initiative provided an immense filip for the abolition movement which culminated in the abolition of the British Slave Trade in 1807. If one man can generated such a successful action against a slave produced commodity, just think what a committed group of Rotarians could achieve. The consumers of Clarkson's time knew their power and they used it to great effect....so why can't we ?

Mark Little
23 August 2009