



Rotarians combating Child Slavery – July 2009

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” – Dr Martin Luther King

The injustice of slavery.... There is a struggle going on in the world on human rights issues. A struggle that demands we choose sides – not between black and white – not between rich or poor – not between Christians or Muslims. No, it is a harder choice that that. It is a choice between commitment & indifference, between dignity & servitude, between right & wrong, between fairness & injustice. The use of children as slaves is the greatest of injustices.

Child slavery....is often confused with “child labour” or “child exploitation”. It is a fact of life that there are millions of children all over the world who are working in places like food stalls, hotels and restaurants or as domestic servants because they may be the only bread winners in their family. But for these unfortunates at least they have a choice, albeit a very difficult one, to work or not to work, to leave or not to leave. A child who is a slave has no choice. A slave is someone who is *“unpaid, unable to leave and is controlled by violence or the threat of violence”*. For these children, their free will is taken away. Their labour, their lives and their minds are consumed by someone else’s greed. It is intended that the proposed Rotarian Action Group focuses its attentions solely on this group of the world’s disadvantaged. Attempting to tackle the broader issue of “child labour” would, I fear, be a bridge too far.

Slavery is illegal...in every country in the world yet there are more slaves now than ever before – an estimated 27 million. That is more than twice the number of people taken out of Africa during the 400 years of the Atlantic Slave Trade and the numbers are growing because of corruption, custom, criminality, poverty and man’s greed for cheaper and cheaper goods. Making something illegal doesn’t make it cease to exist. Making it illegal only causes it to vanish from view. Behind closed doors, in remote places and right under our noses, slavery has continued, making people rich, corrupting officials, feeding our lifestyles and burning up lives.

The majority of these slaves are children....who are increasingly being exploited by unscrupulous land, factory and plantation owners. In some cases these children are lured away from their parents by

contractors on the pretext that the children will receive a good education, learn some skills and subsequently help to improve the economic conditions of their own families. But in many instances, the children are hoodwinked or stolen from their parents, imprisoned in atrocious living and working conditions and beaten if they do not match their owner’s own standards of work.



Child slavery is worldwide....The use of children as slaves is big business in many parts of the world including Europe, USA and England but especially in many of the countries of South America, Africa and Asia. There are many examples of urban economies that are now being built on the use of forced child labour just as the economies of Great Britain and the USA were reliant upon the use of African slaves in the past. In such circumstances, it is to be hoped that there are no Rotarians who are slave holders or who are involved directly or indirectly with slave produced goods.

The reasons for a Rotarian Action Group on Child Slavery

- the kidnap, abuse & use of children as slaves is increasing worldwide
- anti-slavery organisations need extra support from other groups.
- Rotarians need to be reminded of their ethical & other responsibilities. (see below)
- Rotarians should not only help to protect children from polio, other diseases, unsafe water, poor sanitation, but also from the bonds of slavery. The Action Group on Child Slavery will facilitate this task.

The Action Group's aims....These will be to

- provide members with a source of information on child slavery issues and future project opportunities,
- publicise the work of anti-slavery organisations,
- remind Rotarians of their ethical responsibilities re the rights of children.
- encourage Rotarians and Clubs to take action by either a) actively supporting the work of anti-slavery organisations (eg donations) or b) directly supporting various Child Slave Rehabilitation Centres (eg personal visits, participation in Matching Grant projects etc)
- influence other organisations to consider the rights of children and to take action.

Please feel free to suggest other aims which might be undertaken by the Rotarian Action Group, but in doing so please bear in mind that it must be an activity which would be approved by the RI Board.

Ratification by the RI Board....To receive official recognition for our proposed Action Group, we must submit a proposal to Rotary International. Our proposal should include the following:

- Proposed name of the Group.
- Statement of purpose.
- List of proposed officers (a minimum of three) including names, addresses, phone numbers, classification and responsibilities.
- List of willing members from at least three different countries.
- A detailed Action Plan.

Working Group Action Plan....A detailed action plan will include the following

- a justification of the proposed group explaining why the group is relevant to the goals of Rotary.
- background on the expertise the group's founding members have in the subject.
- an explanation of how the group plans to accomplish its service goals.
- types of projects the group intends to promote or conduct and, if available, outlines of pending or prospective projects.
- A listing of individuals and/or institutions (eg neighbourhood communities, private or public organisations, NGOs etc) that may be

involved either in the participation or the benefits of the projects outlined.

- A statement of the expected results or socio-economic impact of the prospective projects, as well as an estimation of the projects' time-frame.

I shall be looking at the above requirements in the next month or so, but in the meantime, if any members wish to help with the Action Plan or to offer their services as an officer of the proposed Rotarian Action Group, please feel free to let me know.

The relevance of the Action Group to Rotary..

As noted previously the Action Plan will need to include a justification of the proposed Group explaining why the Group is relevant to the goals of Rotary. Two references are worthy of note here:-

RI Manual of Procedures - Rights of Children

Rotary International, recognizing that

- 1) children, because of their vulnerability need special care and protection,
- 2) in all countries of the world there are children who are living in exceptionally difficult conditions,
- 3) all children should be able to grow into adulthood in an environment of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom & equality,

endorses and supports the rights of all children to food, shelter, health care, education and freedom from abuse and violence. Rotary clubs around the world are committed to protecting these rights for all children, regardless of race, creed or nationality.

RI Manual of Procedures - Responsibilities of the individual Rotarian.

A world-minded Rotarian will uphold the principles of justice for humankind, recognizing that these are fundamental & must be worldwide.

Comment on this Newsletter....I would welcome any comments, suggestions or criticisms on any issue contained in this first Newsletter. Further Newsletters will be issued on a regular basis.

Mark Little
Rotary Club of Norwich St Edmund, England
14 July 2009