

Rotarians against Child Slavery

(A Newsletter for the proposed Rotarian Action Group - See website www.racsrag.org)

Issue No 11

"Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience & the passion to reach for the stars to change the world"

(Harriet Tubman – escaped slave who returned to help others to freedom.)



Application for RAG status

In my Newsletter of 3 Feb 2010, I reported that there was still uncertainty about the criteria in relation to Rotarian Action Groups (RAGs) and that the moratorium on RAGs meant that the RI Board would not consider any further applications for approval until the 30 June.

With an agreed deadline

date of 19 March 2010, for any further submissions, members will be pleased to know that an application for approval as a RAG has just been submitted to the RI Board.

The submission required answers to various issues, one of which asked for "a justification of the pro-

posed group explaining why the group is relevant to the goals of Rotary."

An extract of the Action Group's submission on these two particular issues is outlined on the next page of this Newsletter.

Any comments on the extract would be greatly appreciated and useful.

Stand at the RI Convention

A few days ago, I received the welcome news that a stand/booth had been approved in the House of Friendship at the next RI Convention in Montreal.

As we are not as yet an official Rotarian Action Group, the stand will be headed "District 1080: Rotarians Against Child Slavery". So now we have to start planning for that event. I will of course be

looking for volunteers to help me staff the stand between 19th-23rd June 2010. Any offers ?

I am also in the course of completing a leaflet which will not only encourage Rotarians to join the Group, but will also explain the raison d'être of the Group and how it will help to combat slavery.

A member has found a

printer in Scotland who is a Rotarian and who has agreed to print 1,000 copies of the leaflet.

I will need help in transporting some of the leaflets to the Montreal Convention, as I suspect my suitcase will be packed with other anti-slavery material for display in the stand. I will let you know later how you can help.

Landmark child slavery case in Ghana

Last month I heard from Free the Slaves (an Anti-Slavery Organization based in Washington DC) that a Ghanaian woman has been sentenced to three years in prison for trafficking two young brothers, aged just six and eight years old into the country's fishing industry. The children, who endured three years of beatings before being rescued, told the police that they were forced to work night and day on fishing boats, without food, even when sick. **It is a landmark case because it is the first time that the country's 2005 anti-trafficking law has been used to convict a child trafficker in the fishing industry where slavery is common.**

On page 3 of this Newsletter is a more detailed article about this evil practice in Ghana, written by a member of the Action Group, ie Harry Payne from Essex in England. Harry, has for some time now, been extremely active in highlighting the extent of global trafficking, denouncing its existence and producing a regular Newsletter which provides an enormous amount of information and advice on the various aspects of human trafficking.

Extracts from Action Group's application to RI Board

The reasons for an Action Group

- a) 200 years after the UK Parliament passed the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, more children than ever before languish in slavery, forced to work, under threat of violence and for no pay. On the African Continent, hundreds of thousands are considered chattel and slavery is accepted as an everyday social institution, whilst on the Indian Sub Continent, millions languish in generational debt bondage. Across the globe, young girls, sold for sex and labour, are already the second most lucrative commodity for organised crime.
- b) Slavery is contrary to the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Article 4 states that *"No one shall be held in slavery or servitude. Slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."*
- c) All countries have ratified this Declaration and other human rights conventions but many do not enforce them. It is left to anti-slavery organisations to remind, encourage and exhort governments, local authorities and communities to honour their obligations to protect the human rights of their own citizens.
- d) Anti-slavery organisations are few in number & have few funds. These organisations therefore need extra support from elsewhere to help them achieve their aims. Rotary International being a global organization is well placed to help in this global problem.
- e) Rotary International does not currently have a stance/policy on "slavery". Indeed the struggle to contain the increase in the use of children as slaves has never featured on Rotary International's radar. The term "slavery" was only added to Article 42 of the RI Code of Policies in relation to the Rights of Children in January 2009 as a result of a request (via a Memorial) by two Rotary Clubs in England. The establishment of such an Action Group might help Rotary International to formulate a position or policy statement on the issue, if it so wishes.
- f) If Rotarians can be a major force in reducing Polio worldwide, they can also be hugely influential in helping to eradicate slavery from the face of the globe. The creation of a Rotarian Action Group against Child Slavery will help with this objective.
- g) Many businesses/local economies are maintained through the use of child slave labour. As Rotarians are business and professional persons, they need to be reminded of their ethical responsibilities and obligations. Most Rotarians are aware of their obligations under the Four Way Test, but very few are aware of their responsibilities under Rotary International's Code of Policies in relation to the Rights of Children (see below) or their responsibilities under RI's Manual of Procedures.(see below)

The Action Group's relevance to the goals of Rotary

The idea to form a Rotarian Action Group against Child Slavery was made during the Presidency of DK Lee. When DK Lee addressed the incoming District Governors in San Diego in January 2008 he said *"In 2008/09 I will ask you all to **Make Dreams Real** for the world's children. This will be our theme and my challenge to you"*. He challenged the audience to do their part to give children *"hope and a chance at a future"*. The raison d'être of the Action Group is to give a significant group of the world's children hope for the future by freeing them physically and psychologically from the bonds of slavery.

In formulating his theme, DK Lee must have been mindful of RI's Code of Policies in relation to the rights of children. Article 42 states that *"Rotary International..... endorses and supports the rights of children to food, shelter, health care, education, and **freedom from abuse, violence and slavery.** Rotary clubs around the world are committed to protecting these rights for all children, regardless of race, creed or nationality."* He must also have been mindful of the RI's Manual of Procedures which informs Rotarians that they should

- defend the rule of law and order to preserve liberty of the individual so that all may enjoy freedom of thought, speech, and assembly; freedom from all persecution and aggression; and freedom from want and fear.
- uphold the principles of justice for humankind, realising that these are fundamental and must be worldwide. (see International Service – Responsibility of the individual Rotarian)

Children at work on Lake Volta, Ghana

(By Harry Payne, Rotary Club of Wickford, England)

“We are all aware of the everyday products that can have at some time in their production, input from slave or bonded labour, eg coffee, chocolate, rugs, cotton, car tyres, furniture, the list is almost endless. As consumers, we can through various organizations like Rugmark, Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, exert pressure to improve conditions for those unfortunate to be ensnared in this global web of slavery.

However there are millions of slaves, a large proportion of them children, who fall outside of this category. They have had, until now, no one fighting their corner, no one looking to free them from their bonds of slavery. Among them are those who live and work on and around Lake Volta in Ghana. Volta is the largest man-made reservoir in the world. It was created in 1965 when the Volta River was dammed to generate electricity. The lake once abundant with fish provided jobs for thousands of people. But because of the over-fishing and poor catch management, stocks have dwindled. The fishermen then began using large mosquito nets with smaller mesh to catch more and more smaller fish, thus decimating stock levels.

In Ghana there is a museum, which shows visitors where slaves, in former times, were once kept before they boarded ships to be trafficked to the New World. You can touch the old chains and latches and feel the whipping posts. You can read about the cruelty that existed. Now, if you choose, you can walk down the road to and see a different kind of slavery – the 21st century slavery. Here you may be able to talk to children, some as young as five, who have been sold into bondage by their own parents or relatives; sold to fishermen on the lake who use children, whose hands and fingers are small and nimble enough to pick fish out of their nets. These are children, who for hours at a time, bale out water from the boats to keep them afloat and who are forced to dive into the murky waters of the lake to free snagged nets.

It is reported that around 20 percent of Volta's child population is sold into slavery. A conservative estimate suggests around 7,000 boys are on the lake at any one time! Where do these boys come from ? The uneducated and poorest parents are forced to make a stark choice, attempt to keep all their children and almost certainly, have them all go hungry, or sell a child to feed those who remain. This means that if a child is rescued there can be no return home. If they are returned, it is likely that they will be sold again. A common refrain from parents in the villages is: “The masters can feed them, while I cannot.” The masters are in fact Slave Holders or People Traffickers. Often parents lose track of their offsprings.

Ghana was the first country to sign the United Nations Covenant on the Rights of the Child. It signed a regional pact with other African nations, and passed anti trafficking laws of its own. Until now, the only noticeable thing the government had done is to put up posters saying child trafficking is illegal. At long last some action is now being taken to stop this immoral practice in Ghana. A better way of ending slavery in the country is through improved education facilities. But this is the same for all slavery endemic countries.”

Campaign to end Domestic Slavery

I have just learnt from Anti-Slavery International (ASI) that in a few months time, the International Labour Organization (ILO), which is part of the United Nations, will discuss creating a new convention on domestic work at its annual conference in June. This represents an historic and rare opportunity to increase legal protection for domestic workers, reduce their vulnerability to slavery and end their abuse.

What can you do ? You can help domestic workers around the world by calling on governments worldwide to support the adoption of the new ILO convention on domestic work.

ASI suggests the following options:-

Take action if you are in the UK

Please write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Yvette Cooper MP, calling on the UK government to support the adoption of the proposed new convention on domestic work. The Department for Work and Pensions is the UK government department responsible for ILO matters.

ASI has provided us with a very simple way of achieving the above objective. If you click onto the under mentioned link (which already provides an appropriate letter to the Secretary of State), all you will need to do is to enter your name and email address and press the "submit" button. You can even adapt the letter with your own words before sending it, if you wish.

http://www.antislavery.org/english/campaigns/home_alone/call_on_uk_government_to_end_domestic_slavery.aspx

Take action if you are outside the UK

183 countries are members of the ILO. We need to persuade as many governments as possible to support the new ILO convention. So please write to the Minister of Labour in your country, urging him or her to support the adoption of the new ILO convention.

If you click on the link below, it will provide you with a list of the Ministries of Labour around the world. For each country, the list will provide, the name of the Minister, the postal address and the email address. The link will also provide a sample letter.

http://www.antislavery.org/english/campaigns/home_alone/call_on_governments_worldwide_to_end_domestic_slavery.aspx

I would be grateful if you would let me have any response so that I can pass all response to my contact at Anti-Slavery International.

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil, is for good men to do nothing” (Edmund Burke)

Mark Little, RC of Norwich St Edmund, England
20th March 2010
Action Group's Website: www.racsrag.org