

# Rotarians against Child Slavery

(A Newsletter for the proposed Rotarian Action Group)

“What good is our economic & political power if we cannot use it to free slaves? If we can't choose to stop slavery, how can we say that we are free? (Kevin Bales)



“Q” freed from slavery in northern Sudan – his mother and “Q” were taken into slavery when their community was burned to the ground in southern Sudan



“A” was taken into slavery when she was 5 yrs old. North Arabs “converted” her to Islam. She was forced to do everything around the house, repeatedly raped, by master & given left overs to eat like a dog.

Issue No 8

## Slavery in the Sudan

Two Action Group members have recently suggested that I look at two links which relate to modern day slavery in the Sudan and the work which is being undertaken by two human rights groups to alleviate the situation in that unhappy country.

The first prompt came from Colorado, USA and referred to honours recently received by Pastor Hiedi McGinness for her work as a passionate defender of the victims of slavery & genocide in the Sudan. Pastor Heidi is a Director of Christian Solidarity International (CSI), which is a human rights organisation whose programmes in the Sudan, Iraq and Pakistan bring rescue directly to victims of oppression.

The second prompt came from the UK and referred

to a recent motion moved in the House of Lords by Baroness Caroline Cox which called attention to the recent and disturbing developments in the Sudan. Baroness Cox is a former Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords and is a notable advocate of human rights around the world. In 2003 she founded the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART) – an organisation which works to provide aid and advocacy for those who are, or who have been, suffering oppression and persecution, and who are largely neglected by the international media.

I do not have enough space in this Newsletter to adequately describe the horrors which the indigenous peoples in the southern areas of Sudan have endured (and are still enduring) over the past two decades. Suffice

it to say that after being captured in violent and incessant raids by Arabs in the north of the country, they become brutalised property, raped, often mutilated, by masters intent on obliterating their cultural identities by smashing their humanity. It would appear that the government in the north of Sudan condones their enslavement as a weapon of war against a fierce southern rebellion.

If you would like to find out more about what is happening in the Sudan on the slavery front or would like to help the work of HART or CSI, then please click on to the following websites ie [www.csi-int.org](http://www.csi-int.org) (CSI) & [www.hart-uk.org/](http://www.hart-uk.org/) (HART).

Better still, obtain a copy of Baroness Cox's book “This Immoral Trade”. Go to Chapter 1 and let the slaves of Sudan speak.

## RI Board's views on Action Groups

In a previous Newsletter I referred to the RI Board's decision to introduce a moratorium on the approval of new Action Groups.

I have since heard that the RI Board is concerned with the almost explosive

growth of RAGS and the possible conflict with the Rotary Foundation and its prime programme, ie Polio Eradication.

As a result the President has created an Ad Hoc Committee to look into the whole scenario. This

committee will comprise three Directors, two Trustees and a representative of 5 RAGS.

The Committee will meet for the first time **today**, ie 14<sup>th</sup> January in San Diego to review the situation.

## The first Spin - by Carol Metzker



Former child slaves gather around a motorbike funded by the Rotary Clubs of Norwich St Edmund (UK) & West Chester Downtown (PA, USA) at Bal Vikas Ashram, near Allahabad, India.



“Rajneesh,” who conducts raids and child-slave rescues, as well as keeps operations running smoothly at Bal Vikas Ashram (BVA) – A Child-Slave Rehab Center, took the first spin on a motorbike provided by Rotarians this month. He traveled to the area of Bhadohi, India, to check on the health of Asmat, a boy who was a slave in the carpet industry, and the financial situation of Asmat’s family. After Asmat was rescued, he was treated at BVA and returned to his home, but he is currently suffering from cardiac problems.

In the next few years, the motorbike will enable staff from BVA to make numerous field visits to ensure the continued

health, well-being and freedom of children who were rescued from slavery.

The Rotary Clubs of West Chester Downtown (US) and Norwich St. Edmunds (UK) provided funds for the motorbike, helmet and accessories. It was the first project undertaken by the newly forming Action Group, Rotarians Against Child Slavery.

Bal Vikas Ashram is a Child Slave Rehabilitation Center near Allahabad, India, that has served more than 450 children since the year 2000. During their recovery and rehabilitation at the center, boys receive medical and psychological treatment. They also receive an education—general liter-

acy, vocational training and information about human rights—that helps protect them and their villages against further slavery after the children have returned home.

The motorbike project may have been small in scope, but it was a big success. Through it Rotarians learned how to make the process work, and its success left Rotarians excited and eager to embark on further projects. It will also make a huge difference in the lives of numerous children.

Carol Metzker  
RC of West Chester  
Downtown, PA, USA

## The earthquake in Haiti

The catastrophic earthquake that struck Haiti this week will further devastate one of the world's poorest nations. The disaster leaves thousands of families more vulnerable to slavery.

In Haiti, thousands of children (some as young as 4 yrs) termed *restaves* are sent each year by their poor rural families to stay with wealthier families. Supposedly they will be sent to school, in exchange for domestic labour. This rarely happens. Instead they work more than 14 hrs a day for no compensation and are frequently abused. The Haitian Government estimates that between 90,000-120,000 children are enslaved as *restaves*, but UNICEF puts this number at 300,000. 75% are girls, many of whom are sexually exploited.

Beyond the immediate humanitarian efforts now underway, Haitians will require sustained support to ensure that the progress they have made in combating slavery is not lost. The Washington based anti-slavery organization Free the Slaves work closely with two grassroots groups that fight the entrenched system of child slavery on the ground in Haiti. One group, [Limye Lavi](#), is based near the earthquake epicenter in Jacmel. The second group, KOFVIV, is based in Port-au-Prince. Many of its members live in the impoverished neighborhoods that now lay in ruins. To ensure that these anti-slavery efforts can continue at this critical time, please consider contributing to the [Free the Slaves Haiti Fund](#). Choose “Haiti Fund” in the online donation designation window.

## Human Trafficking

A member in Canada has pointed out that the Action Group's website provides details of the main forms of slavery (chattel slavery, debt bondage, contract slavery, forced labour, slavery linked to religion) but was puzzled by the exclusion of "human trafficking". This is quite correct because "trafficking" is simply a mechanism or conduit which brings people into slavery. It is one process of enslavement itself, not a condition or result of that process.

The International Labour Organisation estimates that there are approximately 2.5 million who are in slavery at the moment, after being trafficked. This is just under 10% of the total estimate of all slaves which is 27 million. Most people in slavery are sedentary. That is, they have not been moved from one place to another. The bulk of human trafficking (75%) is taking place in the industrialized countries (eg USA and UK) and in the Middle East.

### Further facts about trafficking

- a) 800,000 people are trafficked across borders each year (US State Department)
- b) It is estimated that 2 children per minute are trafficked for sexual exploitation.
- c) UNICEF believes that this amounts to an estimated 1.2 million trafficked every year.
- d) In 2004, between 14,500 and 17,500 people were trafficked into the USA (US State Dept)
- e) Human trafficking generates between 10 and 12 billion dollars a year (UNICEF)
- f) Total profit from human trafficking is second only to the trafficking of drugs.

## A plea to members

Please will you try to encourage other Rotarians to join the Action Group by visiting the website and enrolling or alternatively by letting me have their contact details. We really do need more members worldwide so that the message about the evils of modern day slavery can be shared with other Rotarians. Also, I would really welcome relevant contributions from members (similar to Carol Metzker's) for inclusion in future Newsletters. The contributions should not be too long.

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Action Group's Website: [www.racsrag.org](http://www.racsrag.org)

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