

Rotarians against Child Slavery

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

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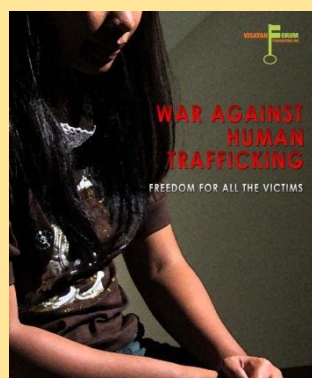
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Contents

	Page
President Obama's new offensive against human trafficking	1
Editorial	2
Ending Slavery	3
Why are we Rotarians ?	4

Editor: Mark Little – Rotary Club of Norwich St Edmund, England

"There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want, and that they grow up in peace." (Kofi Annan)



"Our fight against human trafficking is one of the great human rights causes of our time" (President Barack Obama)

President Obama's offensive against human trafficking

We know that human trafficking is a major problem throughout the USA. Indeed in the last two Newsletters we have learnt how Rotarians in Oregon and Pennsylvania have been combating the problem in their own States.

So today when I was alerted by US members to a relevant news report from "France 24", I knew that I had to share the information with all other members of the Action Group to give them encouragement that they may be getting help from the US authorities. So the French television channel's report is reproduced as received, below.

President Barack Obama announced Tuesday a new offensive against what he called the "modern slavery" of human trafficking. Obama said 20 million people around the world, including some in the United States, are trapped by traffickers, whether as prostitutes or barely paid workers

"It's a debasement of our common humanity," Obama

said in a speech to the Clinton Global Initiative, a coalition of civil society groups, in New York. "I'm talking about the injustice, the outrage, of human trafficking, which must be called by its true name -- modern slavery."

The President said he had ordered US agencies to ramp up efforts to eliminate human trafficking. This will include tightening compliance with laws preventing federal contractors from using trafficked workers, strengthening legal procedures to combat traffickers and help victims, and publicizing the problem.

"Our message today to them is, to the millions around the world, is we see you, we hear you," Obama said, addressing what he said were the often unseen victims of traffickers. "Our fight against human trafficking is one of the great human rights causes of our time."

Obama, America's first black President, called trafficking "barbaric" and said he did not use the word slavery lightly.

"When a man desperate for work finds himself... working for, toiling for, little or no pay and is beaten if he tries to escape, that is slavery," Obama said. "When a little boy is kidnapped, turned into a child soldier, forced to kill, or be killed, that is slavery."

Obama said America had long rejected slavery, but that "for all the progress that we've made, the bitter truth is that trafficking goes on right here in the United States." He asked former victims turned advocates to stand up in the audience at the conference center, calling them "an incredible inspiration."

"These women endured unspeakable horror, but in their unbreakable will, in their courage, in their resilience, they remind us that this cycle can be broken. Victims can be not only survivors, they can become leaders," Obama said, leading sustained applause for the women. [sic]

Note: "France 24" is an international news and current affairs television channel based in Paris.



Editorial

Earlier this year we learnt about the significant donations dished out by Google to several coalitions fighting to end modern slavery. In our last Newsletter we highlighted the announcement that the Indian Cabinet was poised to ban “child labour” and now we have President Obama’s proposed onslaught against trafficking in the USA.

What is going on ? Are the activities of anti-slavery activists finally paying dividends ? Is the world slowly coming to its senses ? Will the Rotary International Board finally recognize the significance of our Action Group’s work and ratify its existence ?

There is no doubt that in many countries, laws on trafficking are vague, punishment is slight and criminal gangs find it easier to transport people than drugs.

The crime itself is now called “trafficking” rather than by its true name ie the “slave trade”. Why ? Is it because we wish to pretend that the act of “trafficking” is less serious than that of slave trading ? Who decided that the words “slave trade” (a term enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), should be replaced by the word “trafficking”.

There also seems to be some confusion between the modern word “trafficking” and “slavery”. The TV channel “France 24” talks about “*the modern slavery of*

human trafficking”. One member of our Action Group recently pointed out that the Group’s website provides details of the main forms of slavery (chattel slavery, debt bondage, contract slavery, forced labour, slavery linked to religion etc) but asked why “human trafficking” had been excluded from the list.

I was obliged to explain that “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. However, I still prefer to use the word “slave trade” rather than “trafficking”

Article 4 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: “*No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms*”.

Every nation on earth signed up for this Declaration, yet in reality many governments appear to be doing very little to enforce their own ratification of this important Convention.

In many cases implementing the necessary legislation has been painfully slow. For example in the UK, it was only in 2004, (ie over 50 years later), under the Asylum and Immigration Act, that trafficking for all forms of labour exploitation was made a criminal offence.

Returning to the trafficking problem in the USA, according to the 10th edition

of its own Department of State “Trafficking in Persons Report”, the US is a source, transit and destination country for men, women and children subjected to trafficking in persons, specifically forced labour, debt bondage, and forced prostitution. Trafficking occurs primarily for labour and most commonly in domestic servitude, agriculture, manufacturing, janitorial services, hotel services, construction, health and elder care, hair and nail salons, and strip club dancing. Vulnerabilities remain even for legally documented temporary workers who typically fill labour needs in the hospitality, landscaping, construction, food service, and agricultural industries.

The above is only a snippet of information contained about the trafficking issue in the USA. In reality the report, which is a useful document highlighting the trafficking situation in every country in the world, contains seven pages of information on the US scene.

I am indebted to Kevin Bales for allowing me to reproduce (on page 3) an extract from his book “Ending Slavery”. The extract outlines the true nature of slavery in a very unique way and how and why people’s perception of slavery has changed over the years.

If it was difficult to abolish legal slavery and the slave trade, shouldn’t it be easier to eradicate illegal slavery and human trafficking ?



“Human trafficking is the dislocation of someone by deception or coercion for exploitation, through forced labour, forced prostitution or other forms of slavery”

(Steve Chalke – “Stop the Traffik”)



Extract from “Ending Slavery

by kind permission of Kevin Bales, Co-Founder, Free the Slaves

“Imagine a world where slavery is normal, where slavery is considered good business, offering solid returns. In this world “excess” people- the very poor, for example – can be put to productive uses that benefit everyone.

In this world every dirty, dangerous, and demeaning job has someone to do it. In this world, every war produces a rich harvest of new slaves.

Once oil is burned, its gone, but slaves are the product that keeps on producing (and reproducing for that matter) With a little food and shelter, you can squeeze work out of your slaves for years and years.

They are livestock with the brains and motor skills to do factory work or be your sex toy, care for your children or run your shop.

In the world the profits of slavery build universities and concert halls and hospitals. The slave trade finances mansions and art shows and political careers. People who don't have a slave want one, and people who have slaves want more. Slaves are such flexible investments – you can put them up as collateral, lend them out, or rent them to a neighbour. You can make it your business to insure slaves, deal in slaves or sell the tools and chains needed to control slaves.

You can wholesale or retail slaves, ship them, or run a stable for slaves. You can leave them to your children, or sell them a few to fund your retirement. And when you go to church, you will be reassured from the pulpit that this world is not just normal but good, and that God is smiling down on you and your happy slaves.

Sounds crazy ? It shouldn't. This has been our world for most of human history. From the dim moment when the first scribe started to scratch symbols in the first mud tablet, recording the life of our species, there were slaves. Greece, Rome, Renaissance Europe – great empires that created the beauty, art and literature of our past – were powered by slaves, stoked up to creative heat with the burning muscles of slaves.

After five thousand years of slavery, some people began to question this fixture of human life. At first a few people, then more and more, began to think of slaves not as livestock, but as human beings.

When enough people thought that way, religion changed its view as well, and slavery became first distasteful, then wrong, then deeply morally repugnant – for most people. Some leaders had

a change of heart, other politicians found that even though the donations were fatter from the slave traders, the abolitionist had the votes, and a change of heart came over them as well. In a wonderful sleight of hand, they delivered a world where slavery was “abolished”. With a stroke of the pen, slavery was gone, and everyone felt much better.

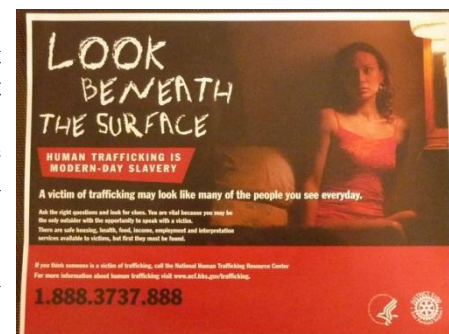
But making something illegal doesn't make it cease to exist; making it illegal only causes it to vanish from view. The abolition of slavery was immensely significant when laws were effectively enforced, but it also blinded people to ongoing slavery.

Subsequent generations have been unaware that legal abolition didn't make slavery go away, that it only masked the problem. Behind closed doors, in remote places and right under our noses, slavery has continued making people rich, feeding our lifestyles and burning up lives”

NB “Ending Slavery” is available at Amazon in Hardcover, Paper Back and Kindle.



Child slave working in a carpet loom in India



Why are we Rotarians ?

“We are in Rotary to change the world – why else would we be Rotarians ? We are not here to listen to the naysayers, the doom-mongers, those who say the world can be no better than it is, so why even try to change ? We are here because we believe in change”

(Kalyan Banerjee – RI President
2011/12)



Model answers to that question can be found in an excellent leaflet issued by RIBI (Rotary in Great Britain and Ireland) which is, in reality, not aimed at existing members but at potential members with the question “Why join Rotary”.

So we have appropriate answer headings such as a) fun & friendship, b) business opportunities, c) personal growth & development, d) travel opportunities, e) the chance to learn, and f) the chance to make a difference.

At the RI Convention in New Orleans in May 2011, President Kalyan Banerjee posed the above question to delegates and then supplied his own answer which was a deeper and much more meaningful reason for continuing membership.

He said *“I believe we are here because we care, and because we see both what is wrong in the world and what is right”*. He stressed that we

should take a hard look at what needs to be changed and then do our best to change it.

In reminding us of his favourite Gandhi quote (“you must be the change you wish to see in the world”), Kalyan stated that he believed that *“we are in Rotary to change the world – for why else would we be Rotarians ? We are not here to listen to the naysayers, the doom-mongers, those who say the world can be no better than it is, so why even try to change ? We are here because we believe in change”*

So what can we change ? First we must change the minds of some of our Rotary leaders who, in spite of the recent anti-slavery and anti-trafficking pronouncement from US and Indian political leaders, still believe that attempting to eliminate child slavery and human trafficking is to be frowned

upon by Rotarians because it might offend certain sections of society. In truth, the only people who will be offended will be the traffickers and the slave masters.

Secondly we must not restrict our attentions to battling against killer diseases, low literacy levels, poverty, lack of water and non-existence sanitation but also embrace our commitment to protecting the human rights for all individuals especially our children. After all what is the point of having Article 8.050.3 of RI’s Code of Policies.

Unless this has recently been rescinded, this says that Rotarians should

- defend the rule of law and order in order to preserve the liberty of the individual.....
- uphold the principles of justice for humankind.....

The Action Group needs more members

PLEASE PASS ON THIS NEWSLETTER ANDS ALSO ENCOURAGE FELLOW ROTARIANS TO VISIT OUR WEBSITE AND SIGN ON AS A MEMBER. THE WEBSITE IS www.racsrag.org. The webmaster is Stephen Sypula, RC of Stevenage Grange, England.

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26th September 2012



