

Take Action!

Sex Trafficking Must Be Stopped!

by MARCIA J. WEISS

What is human (or sex) trafficking?

The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states that “neither slavery nor involuntary servitude... shall exist within the United States,” yet human trafficking is present in every state, and few laws are in place to stop it. Human trafficking is the modern form of slavery, undermining our values and beliefs and promoting a severe breakdown in society. It is a horrific violation of human rights. Scores of women and children, both girls and boys, are trafficked each year within or across national borders as part of a \$32-billion annual industry. The U.S. State Department estimates that 27 million people are trafficked for labor, sex and other exploitative practices across the globe every year. Every 30 seconds another person becomes a victim of sex trafficking. Cases are reported in every country and in all 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. territories.

As the fastest-growing organized crime enterprise and the third largest criminal enterprise in the world, sex trafficking is big business. Between 14,000 and 17,500 people are trafficked into the United States annually, and approximately 100,000 American children are victims of community sex traffick-

ing. Victims are generally under the age of 25, some as young as 12 to 14. Women and girls make up 98 percent of the victims. These staggering figures indicate that we must TAKE ACTION to ensure that the practice of sex trafficking ceases and that the traffickers and buyers are punished. Simple marketing principles apply: Demand drives supply and if there are no buyers, there will be no business. Current trafficking practices rely on secrecy and public ignorance to operate successfully. We must increase awareness and make trafficking a high priority in order to curb the practice.

Who are the victims?

Victims of trafficking are among the most economically vulnerable in society. They are generally victims of poor economic conditions, economic deprivation and disadvantage, and lack of family support and education. They are enticed with the promise of a better life. Once recruited, traffickers use a variety of methods toward their victims, including starvation, confinement, beatings, physical abuse, rape, threats of violence and forced drug use. Victims may also endure psychological harm, including shame, grief, fear, distrust, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. Victims generally arrive in the U.S. on tourist visas but

overstay their time limits; others have fraudulent documents.

Where does trafficking occur?

Trafficking is a national as well as a global problem. Aside from those victims trafficked within the United States, others come primarily from Latin America, the countries of the former Soviet Union and Southeast Asia. Entry points are strategic sites along the U.S.-Canadian border, the St. Lawrence River, airports and military bases, easy access ports in Florida and along the East and West coastlines. States like Pennsylvania are considered “pass-through” states for trafficking as well as a destination. Favorite airports in the East are Bradley in Connecticut and JFK. San Francisco is a popular entry point in the West. When the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) cracks down on one area of the country, the entry points shift elsewhere. Victims are moved in organized trafficking circuits from one place to another, from one brothel to another to prevent them from establishing contacts who could provide assistance, to escape detection from law enforcement, and provide a change of women for male buyers. Major sporting events such as the Super Bowl tend to attract increased sex trafficking.

Spiritual Entrepreneurs

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what’s possible in our lives and in the world,” IKAR’s website proclaims. Basya Schechter, lead singer of the folk rock band Pharaoh’s Daughter, which blends Hasidic, Middle Eastern, devotional and ecstatic world music, recently became Romemu’s music director. “People really sing; there’s a real sense of ruach (spirit) in the room. The music feels undeniably Jewish even if it’s a Sufi chant,” says Ingber.

Brous tries to take a fresh look at every holiday and ritual experience. In IKAR’s first year, she recast the tradi-

tional Yizkor booklet, usually a list of congregants and the loved ones they have lost. On Rosh Hashanah, she asked congregants to choose someone they wanted to remember, to recall a struggle they had with the person, what his or her voice sounded like, and the greatest blessing the person gave them. Write a few paragraphs, she urged. The next day the office received 100 submissions. They were bound together into a Book of Memories, which was distributed on Yom Kippur. “Many people hadn’t been to Yom Kippur services in 15 to 20 years,” Brous recalls. “Yet they stayed the whole day because they were reading the Yizkor book. Then they found

each other and shared similar stories of brothers they had lost or fathers with the same names. It created a sacred space for memory and helped build community.” The booklet has become a regular and powerful part of High Holiday services.

Social justice is not just an optional committee at IKAR. Members sign a “multilevel membership covenant” that features a commitment to be part of Minyan Tzedek, which has four paths of engagement: direct service (feeding the hungry, tutoring children); organizing to effect legislative change (immigration reform and preventing gun violence); global partnership (promoting human rights through an Israeli

What can be done?

Major legislation is pending, aimed at awareness and remedies to curb and eventually eliminate sex trafficking. The Human Trafficking Prioritization Act, HR 2283, elevates the State Department Trafficking in Persons Office to the status of a bureau, giving human trafficking a higher priority and allocating more resources to address the problem on a national level. The End Sex Trafficking Act of 2013, HR 2805, provides for the arrest and prosecution of the buyers of sex from minors and other victims, not just the traffickers. The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2014, S 1738/HR 3530, proposes creation of a "Domestic Trafficking Victims' Fund" at the Treasury Department that the Attorney General can use to fund victims' support programs. It would also increase law enforcement resources in the hopes of reducing demand for human trafficking by targeting purchasers. This bill passed in the House on May 20, but it is unlikely to pass in the Senate. If successful, all these bills would decrease demand for sex trafficking and increase the means of preventing it.

Take action!

Urge your legislators to support the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2013. Let's raise awareness of this outrageous practice and take steps to eliminate it. Let's educate our educators

about the practice of targeting school-age children to engage in sex trafficking. Let's encourage local schools to make sex trafficking awareness part of their curriculum. NA'AMAT USA pledges to protect women and children. Let's redouble our efforts to bring an end to this heinous practice of sex trafficking.

Sex trafficking in Israel

Israel has been taking serious, effective steps against sex trafficking over the past several years.

In 2006, the government passed and implemented the Anti-Trafficking Law, which prohibits all forms of trafficking in persons and prescribes strong penalties for traffickers. It also identifies sex trafficking survivors as victims rather than criminals and ensures that they are transferred directly to a state shelter and not placed in detention.

In 2008, Israel ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. This was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2000 and ratified by 159 countries as of February 2014.

With an anti-trafficking agency working with police cooperation, along with educational programs, Israeli officials say that most of the trafficking from outside the country has been stopped.

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NA'AMAT USA Resolution on Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking is the most common form of modern-day slavery. Scores of women and children, both girls and boys, are trafficked each year within or across national and international borders as part of a \$32-billion annual industry. As the third largest and fastest-growing organized criminal enterprise in the world, sex trafficking is big business. An estimated 800,000 women and children are trafficked across international borders and additional individuals are trafficked within countries.

WHEREAS trafficking occurs in every country, in all 50 states, and in all cities and towns, both large and small;

WHEREAS victims of trafficking are generally under the age of 25, some as young as 12 to 14;

WHEREAS an estimated 293,000 American children are at risk of becoming victims;

WHEREAS sex trafficking promotes a severe breakdown in society, promotes organized crime groups, threatens government authority and encourages widespread corruption among vulnerable populations;

WHEREAS agencies, educators and law enforcement at all levels must remain alert to this issue and address it vigilantly;

NOW THEREFORE, NA'AMAT USA speaks for women and children in the United States and strongly urges our legislators to enforce existing laws aggressively and enact new legislation with harsh and severe penalties to deter those engaged in sex trafficking and purchasers.

solar energy project in Uganda), and green action (environmental sustainability). The topics were hammered out at a series of house parties.

Another series of house parties, held weekly, encourages people to get to know one another. Hosts invite people in the same zip code to share wine, cheese and Torah study around issues they care about and that ground their struggles in the language of tradition, says Brous: "What does it mean to be 30 and single? Two of my friends in their 30s have breast cancer. How do I come to terms with that?"

Brous grew up an "illiterate" Jew in Short Hills, New Jersey, with no rabbi or role model to guide her. Driven by

lack of knowledge and intrigued by Orthodoxy, she embarked on a course of study during her junior year of college in Jerusalem. At an outreach weekend devoted to proving the scientific existence of God, she walked out unconvinced by the codes and formulas but sure of her own faith. "I decided right then that I was going to be a rabbi, even though I couldn't even say kiddush." Today, she mentors young rabbis and shares her ideas with people across the country.

As communities like IKAR and Romemu become more established, they are growing out of the temporary spaces they currently inhabit (IKAR meets at a JCC; Romemu at a Presbyterian church) and are looking for perma-

nent homes. "It's a huge step," Brous acknowledges. "But I don't fear we will be institutionalized once we have a building because innovation is built into the culture of this community."

Whether in temporary or permanent homes, spiritual communities share a similar mission: to awaken the soul. "The more tools in the toolbox," says Lau-Lavie, "the better." ■

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