

The Anti-Slavery Movement: Facilitating Change in Your Local Community

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Today, there are over 27 million slaves in the world (Bales, 1999). This means that there are more slaves now in 2008, than there have been at any other time in history. Although slavery has never ceased to occur, social and economic changes worldwide over the past 50 plus years have contributed to an alarming growth in the extent to which slavery is happening today, (Bales, 2004). Some of these contributing factors include population growth, especially in regions of the world where there are limited resources to support such population expansion, the push in more advanced market economies for inexpensive labor and goods, and widespread corruption in governments and law enforcement communities worldwide. Those most vulnerable to becoming slaves are those living in less advantaged regions characterized by extreme poverty. Women and children comprise 80% of those typically enslaved and 50% of those enslaved are under the age of eighteen.

The term “human trafficking” is often used to refer to slavery and this blatant abuse of basic human rights has only begun to receive the international attention it deserves. Human trafficking as defined by the United Nations refers to all acts related to the recruitment, transport, sale, or purchase of individuals through force, fraud or other coercive means for the purpose of economic exploitation (2000). This definition has been widely accepted by those involved in fighting the illegal activities of trafficking and it has been used as the foundation for law making in countries worldwide.

In 1998 the United Nations decided to develop a Protocol as part of the existing United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, as it is formally called, was completed in October of 2000, and the General Assembly adopted the Protocol together with the Convention the following month, November 2000. The primary objective of the Member States in negotiating the Protocol was to maintain a balance between attention to issues relevant to law enforcement and those relevant to the protection of victims. As it stands today, the protocol has three purposes to be taken up by member states:

- To prevent and combat trafficking in persons, paying particular attention to women and children;
- To protect and assist victims of trafficking, with full respect for their human rights; and
- To promote cooperation among States in order to meet these objectives.

Human trafficking is occurring in every country in the world. Which means that at this very moment, women, children, and men are being exploited, which often includes physical and psychological mistreatment. The work that slaves today are forced to do is generally work at the lower end of the economic continuum and typically falls into the categories of agriculture, domestic service, industry (factory work or construction) and sex servitude. Slavery is a problem that can be solved. Yet many, who may be in a position to provide help, are unaware that it is even an issue. When considered from an economic standpoint with people essentially being commoditized, supply and demand issues emerge as salient places to direct intervention. On the supply side, a focus on eliminating the desperate life circumstances that create vulnerability to victimization and the provision of education about human trafficking and how to best avoid

being pulled into an exploitative and dangerous situation. On the demand side, a focus on education about today's slavery in general and about how economic variables (unequal distribution of resources, demand for low prices, etc.) play into its occurrence. In addition, information about how to identify human trafficking victims and how to best prepare communities to respond to survivor needs. Typically, "demand side" interventions need to be employed in regions with more advanced market economies as these regions are often the targeted destinations for the victims of traffickers.

One model for addressing the latter is to tap into resources available through the use of volunteers. Community based volunteer groups can be extremely powerful and effective at raising consciousness about slavery. Volunteers, especially when pulled from diverse backgrounds, comprise a rich multidisciplinary team. Volunteers benefit from contact with each other (e.g. learning new skills through exposure to the expertise of others) and from a sense of involvement in a critical social justice movement.

One challenge facing volunteer-based community groups is funding. The coupling of a community based group with a college or university can alleviate some of the financial burden as the university may be able to absorb costs typically associated with overhead (e.g., provision of website and web-based services, office space, computers etc.) through in-kind donations. Another benefit of partnering with an institution of higher education is the additional resource of student involvement. This type of partnership affords many benefits for the cause, the community volunteers and the students. In this situation, students are able to learn from volunteers and they are able to develop skill sets that will better prepare them for the workplace.

The Project to End Human Trafficking (PEHT) is a group that is founded on the model described above. PEHT (www.endhumantrafficking.org) is a non-profit organization that was founded in 2004 as part of the anti-slavery movement. The initial goal of the founders (a university faculty woman and a female graduate student) was not to begin an organization, but simply to offer educational lectures about human trafficking. They quickly found that the need for information about slavery was great and they consulted with similar groups, such as Free the Slaves, to determine the best way to move forward with their work. PEHT expanded to include volunteers from the local community in which it was founded (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the United States) as well as volunteers from regions all over the world who work at a distance in support of ending slavery. Today, with the help of academically based interns, faculty, and student and community volunteers, PEHT is an active member of the anti-slavery movement. Specifically, PEHT engages in coalition building, educational outreach, direct service to victims, and collaboration with other national and international organizations in the global fight against human trafficking. For consultation about how to begin a similar group in your region of the world, contact Dr. Mary Burke at mburke@endhumantrafficking.org.