

# **WORLD: Human trafficking – hidden in plain sight**

*Human trafficking destroys lives, robs people of their dignity and basic human rights as it causes unfathomable misery to the immediate victims, their families and their communities.*

By Roman Hawatt\*

IPS (21.12.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2TviLvx> – The media globally tends to have a bias to negative, sensational and headline grabbing stories and events and this certainly applies to reporting related to human trafficking in the third world. With the abundance of stories around sweat shops, massage parlours and organ trafficking networks happening ‘somewhere else’, the West is generally desensitised, lacks empathy and fails to fully appreciate the scale of the problem which sits right under their noses and in plain sight.

It is a fact that for a variety of reasons, this insidious trade tends to be more hidden away in the West whilst it is generally conducted more openly in developing countries.

“Human trafficking is a global problem, but it’s a local one too,” U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in 2018 when the U.S. State Department released its 2018 Trafficking in Persons report, which assesses countries around the world based on how their governments work to prevent and respond to trafficking. “Human trafficking can be found in a favourite restaurant, a hotel, downtown, a farm, or in their neighbour’s

home.”

Estimates vary depending on the agency reporting and also depends on specific categorisations. The International Labour Organization for example, estimates 21 million people are affected by forced labour whereas other reputable agencies estimate up to 48 million men, women and children are enslaved and trafficked around the world today.

According to the International Labour Organization, 68 percent are exploited in industry sectors like agriculture, mining, construction and domestic work creating profits of \$150 billion annually.

There is therefore a gigantic financial motive for the maintaining and the growing of this illicit trade which sadly ‘has always been the way of the world’. The ideal of unalienable rights and universal liberty is actually still a relatively new concept in the history of time.

The proposition is diabolically simple in that some human beings will take advantage of and exploit other vulnerable categories of human beings unless there is a strong disincentive and a massive change in the contributing circumstances.

Whatever the cause and whatever the thinking, modern day slavery and human and human organ trafficking is now far more prevalent in the developed world than either the public knows about or was previously thought. Sadder is the fact that even

with the best intent matched with state of the art resources, even the best law enforcement agencies do not appear to be able to keep up with the growing size and scale of the problem.

Even in the U.K., which after all gave the world the Magna Carta in the 13th century, a turning point in establishing human rights and arguably the most significant early influence on the extensive historical process that led to the rule of constitutional law today in the English-speaking world, the numbers of people trafficked is estimated to number in the tens of thousands of victims, according to the National Crime Agency (NCA).

These victims in the UK are predominantly from places like Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa, with a roughly equal balance between men and women in other than the sex industry in which women and girls make up the vast majority of those exploited.

There are also trafficked people of all genders working in more prosaic roles like car washes, construction, agriculture and food processing. They receive very little pay and are forced to put up with poor living conditions.

As a result, the NCA says, it is increasingly likely that someone going about their normal daily life in the U.K., engaging in the legitimate economy and accessing goods and services, will come across a victim who has been exploited in one of those sectors but may never recognise them unless they are educated to the signs.

General indicators of human trafficking or modern slavery tend to be harder to spot in the developed world but can include signs of physical or psychological abuse, fear of authorities, no ID documents, poor living conditions and working long hours for little or no pay.

A 2018 report by the Global Slavery Index estimated that some 403,000 people are trapped in modern slavery in the U.S. – seven times higher than previous figures. In the UK, that figure is estimated at 136,000, nearly 12 times higher than earlier estimates. Andrew Forrest, founder of the Global Slavery Index, called the report “a huge wakeup call.” The report includes forced marriages, noting that women and girls make up 71 percent of people trapped in modern-day slavery today.

The pernicious persistence of modern day slavery is one of the reasons it is addressed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 and these build off of many of the accomplishments achieved with the original Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but which did not address human rights, slavery or human trafficking and were often criticized for being too narrow.

In particular, Sustainable Development Goal 8 of the 17 SDGs is the goal to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, whilst Goal 8.7 specifically addresses modern day slavery and human trafficking. It is worth noting that SDG 8.7 is also supported by two other SDG goals. SDG 5 for example aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, while SDG 16 seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and

build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

“Because modern-day slavery is a global tragedy, combating it requires international action,” said President Barack Obama, who in 2011 issued a Presidential Proclamation designating each January to be National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month. “As we work to dismantle trafficking networks and help survivors rebuild their lives, we must also address the underlying forces that push so many into bondage. We must develop economies that create legitimate jobs [and] build a global sense of justice that says no child should ever be exploited.”

While progress has been made in addressing broader employment issues in some developed nations, such improvements remain overshadowed by the continuing scourge of human slaves being used in the supply chain at both a local and international level.

Whatever the future holds, what is constant is that human trafficking destroys lives, robs people of their dignity and basic human rights as it causes unfathomable misery to the immediate victims, their families and their communities.

Under the circumstances, there must be a seismic shift in awareness and a willingness to act no matter who you are or what community you live in. It is incumbent upon all of us to exercise a higher level diligence and situational awareness aimed at winning the freedom of anyone that is exploited and abused.

With individuals, educators, charity institutions, business and Government each taking incremental steps we can win.

Remember, to save one life is a step towards saving the whole of humanity.

*\*The author, Romy Hawatt is a Founding Member of the Global Sustainability Network ( GSN ) pursuing the United Nations Sustainability Goal number 8 with a special emphasis on Goal 8.7 which 'takes immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms'.*

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