

A Prayer Guide for Break the Chains: Slavery in the 21st Century by Dawn Doerr

Defining the Problem

Human trafficking is the use of violence, coercion, or deception to recruit, transport, transfer, harbor, or receive people for the purpose of exploitation. This exploitation can include prostitution, forced labor, slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs.

Sex trafficking is for the purpose of commercial sex acts. The economic interests may be for money, or for other commodities (food, shelter, drugs) that mainly benefit the exploiter and deny the rights of the exploited. Sexual exploitation includes stripping, live-sex shows, pornography, prostitution, and trafficking for these purposes. It occurs within and across national boundaries.

Scope of the Problem

Sex trafficking is a global issue and it affects all walks of life. Those living in poverty are the overwhelming majority of those victimized by traffickers; but traffickers themselves range from husbands or other male relatives to organized crime to government officials and the military.

A case in point: the United Nations was forced to undertake drastic measures to overhaul its system of monitoring gross abuses by its military and civilian personnel in light of 150 allegations of sexual exploitation on the part of peacekeepers stationed in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In October 2004, the UN Secretary General dispatched a team to DR Congo to conduct an assessment of the magnitude of the problem. In its internal report, the team concluded there was "zero compliance with zero tolerance," referring to the official policy of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse. The cases involved rape and prostitution with children and adult women for money, food, or jobs. (United Nations: Office On Drugs and Crime. *Trafficking in Persons*. 2006)

But there are also signs of hope. In 2004, the Scout Movement, which incorporates nearly all public school students across Indonesia, began an anti-trafficking campaign in Indramayu, West Java, where many young women and girls fall victim to trafficking. The Scout Movement provides anti-trafficking education to 25,000 students in the Indramayu area. They are considering expanding the program to other districts and instituting an anti-trafficking merit badge to encourage more Scouts to learn about and promote anti-trafficking efforts.

These are just two examples of what is happening regarding the issue of sexual trafficking around the world. But this isn't just a problem "over there". It's in our own back yards.

Estimates from the U.S. government state that approximately 50,000 women and children are trafficked into the U.S. each year, primarily from Latin America, Eastern and Central Europe, and Southeast Asia. ("Sex Trafficking of Women in the United States: International and Domestic Trends," Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, March,

2001). This number does not include U.S. citizens who are trafficked domestically or moved out of the country.

Researchers and law enforcement officials admit that exact, reliable figures are almost impossible to achieve due to the secretive nature of the problem. Victims are afraid or unable to come forward. Traffickers become more sophisticated in their methods all the time. Inevitably, therefore, whenever a statistic is cited it is often followed by the qualifying statement that the reported numbers are assumed to be lower than the reality. The reality is that human trafficking rivals drug trafficking and the illegal arms trade for the top criminal activity globally, and places third in generated revenue world-wide.

The website for Break the Chains: Slavery in the 21st Century (www.abwmbreakthechains.org) has many other resources and recommended reading lists that you may use to educate yourself on the issue.

The Impact of the Problem – A Guide for Prayer

Here are seven items to consider. *Use these as guides for prayer, perhaps choosing one each day of the week or praying repeatedly for one item over the course of a week or more.*

- Consider how destitute living conditions unleash a desperate spiral where persons can be misled or coerced into committing their lives to prostitution with promises of a better life in a better place. **Pray** for poverty throughout the world, that God's justice may reign. **Pray** that God will help guide you in knowing what you can do to help alleviate the plight of the poor.
- Consider how slavery is called by other names: prostitution, exotic dancing, massage, mail-order brides, and so forth. Have you always assumed women chose those professions? Consider, even if they did actively choose the profession rather than being forced into it, whether they felt they had any other viable alternatives. **Pray** for your own attitudes, that your eyes may be opened and your heart softened.
- Consider that many brothels exist in areas surrounding military bases, that law enforcement officers and government officials are sometimes involved in trafficking themselves, that men go online to plan vacations through sex tourism websites. Some convince themselves the women really want to be there, others don't care. **Pray** for the "johns"—the only way trafficking will ever be eradicated is if the demand no longer exists.
- Consider the health risks of prostitution, foremost of which are premature death. The top causes of death for prostitutes are homicide, suicide, drug- and alcohol-related problems, and HIV infection. The homicide rate among active female prostitutes has been shown to be 17 times higher than among the general female population (Canadian Medical Association Journal, 2004). **Pray** that medical professionals will be educated in the signs that a patient is a victim of trafficking; that women and girls will be able to find healing.
- Consider that a significant number of those who end up in prostitution were sexually abused as children; that U.S. citizens who are trafficked are often

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- runaways; that traffickers often prey on the vulnerable through offering promises of love or simply good-paying jobs. **Pray** that our families may be healed and strengthened, that victimized children or teens may find help through healthy relationships, that women will have positive options for employment.
- Consider that many young girls (from toddlers through teenagers) are handed over to traffickers by family members because of a devaluation of females in their society, poverty, or debt bondage. **Pray** that cultural attitudes may develop respect for all, regardless of gender or age. **Pray** that parents will be educated to recognize the danger of trafficking and have their awareness raised as to its existence. **Pray** that parents may be released from their own addictions or their own poverty.
 - Consider many modern-day abolitionists who serve in red light districts, government offices, schools, NGOs, faith-based ministries, and other areas of influence. They may work towards stronger laws or current laws being upheld more stringently; they may offer employment alternatives to women and girls in the streets; they may counsel or provide medical care to victims; they may pray and build relationships. **Pray** for the women and men at work to eradicate slavery. **Pray** that God may guide you in knowing how you can also work towards abolition. **Pray** for American Baptist Women's Ministries efforts through the "Break the Chains" mission project.