

Position Statement on Human Trafficking Recommendations by the Voice of the Poor Committee Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Council of the United States

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found. Was blind but now I see. (1)

Situation

Human trafficking includes indentured servitude, forced labor, human bondage and all forms of slavery. The fate of the exploited is held firmly by subjugators. Trafficking victims are abused physically, emotionally, and financially. Unscrupulous employers, for example, manipulate wages to force workers to stay in unspeakable working conditions they would not accept otherwise.(2)(3)

Human trafficking is a violation of body, mind and spirit.(4).Predators use force, fraud and coercion to prey on unemployed or underemployed persons and those lacking access to social safety nets (5), such as a break up of the family, victims of war, political and economic upheaval. Creative and ruthless ploys are designed to win confidence and trust, such as, the promise of work, educational opportunities, or marriage.(6) Traffickers profit from human pain and misery rejecting the sacred dignity and rights of persons who become “nonexistent” when identities are hidden and personal documentation is taken away. Unknown to outsiders, fearing retribution and disgrace, treated as personas non grata, there is little hope of escape.

A web of criminal operators thrives on human trafficking: organized networks, mom and pop “family” operations, small trafficking businesses, and unscrupulous individuals. Intermediaries recruit workers and may use wage advances that lead to major indebtedness.

Victims need not be undocumented, have crossed a US border, or be physically transported from one location to another to be identified as a casualty of human trafficking.(7) Even with laws, such as the *Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, reauthorized in 2003 and 2005 (TVPA)*, and the *Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today Act (PROTECT) of 2003*, victims continue to multiply in the USA and worldwide.(8)

Human trafficking “extends to every country in the world.”(9) The International Labor Organization (ILO) (10), a United Nations agency charged with addressing labor standards, employment, and social protection issues, estimates at least 12.3 million adults and children in forced labor, bonded labor, and commercial sexual servitude at any given time. Latin America accounts for the second largest number of forced laborers after Asia, reports ILO, and the extent is growing.(11)

“In industrialized countries the majority of forced labor victims are caught in vicious trafficking cycles,” according to ILO.(12) At least 1.39 million are victims of commercial sexual servitude, both transnational and within countries, and 56% percent of all forced labor victims are women and girls. (13) An estimated 800,000 to 900,000 victims are trafficked globally each year and 17,500 to 18,500 are trafficked into the United States. (14) The US Department of State keeps a country watch list. Through TVPA the United States may subject countries to sanctions.(15) More is needed to shed light on this intolerable situation, to call for an end to human trafficking, and to protect fundamental human rights including: life, liberty and security of person.(16)

From Our President

**Lord make us responsive to the
Christian call to seek and find the
forgotten, the suffering or the deprived
so that we may bring them your love.**

Prayer of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Brother and Sister Vincentians,

Human trafficking is modern day slavery. As a Voice of the Poor, let us speak out against this evil and call for justice for victims.

Yours in Vincent and Frederic,
Joseph Flannigan, National President
Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Our Position: The Society of St. Vincent de Paul reaffirms our adherence to Catholic Social Teaching, whose foundation is the inviolable dignity of every person from the moment of conception to natural death. (17) We call for care and protection of victims of trafficking. We call for rigorous local, national and international efforts to identify and punish individuals and businesses that trade in persons. We call for greater efforts to eliminate the root causes of poverty. The weak and vulnerable must be protected from this evil. Approved 9-10-10 by the National Council Trustees, National Meeting, New Orleans, LA, Resolution 04/21/2009/10 82

“...the *primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity*: “Man is the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life.”

Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (18)

Church Teaching

Church teaching on the dignity of the human person and the goal of economic life is clear. To this end, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) seeks “to raise awareness among Catholics and others of good will about the devastating impact on vulnerable persons.” USCCB’s *On Human Trafficking* urges “Catholics to work together to identify survivors of human trafficking and to help rescue them from their bondage.” It states:

“As Catholic bishops, we pledge to use the resources of the Church to help end this affliction. We also pledge to use our teaching authority to educate Catholics and others about human trafficking. Human trafficking is a horrific crime against the basic dignity and rights of the human person. All efforts must be expended to end it. In the end, we must work together— Church, state, and community—to eliminate the root causes and markets that permit traffickers to flourish; to make whole the survivors of this crime; and to ensure that, one day soon, trafficking in human persons vanishes from the face of the earth.” (22)

The Church has instituted human services programs to help victims (20) and the USCCB advocates for changes to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act to better protect child victims of trafficking and to ensure that all victims are more readily identified and provided with care.” (21)

To love someone is to desire that person's good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, **there is a good that is linked to living in society: the common good.** It is the good of “all of us”, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it. **To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity....** The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more effectively we love them.

Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (19)

Recommendations for Conferences and Councils

- ♥ Pray for the eradication of human trafficking from the face of the earth and “for all who are suffering, that God may give them courage and consolation.” (24)
- ♥ The Church is identified as a sanctuary — a safe haven where victims and others who know of situations can confide, seek help, and find emotional support. To this end, Councils and Conferences should support Church efforts to educate Catholics and others about the buying, selling and transporting of human beings.
- ♥ Provide Vincentian training on human trafficking and work to facilitate awareness of human trafficking and the need for abolition of this scourge in your local community, in the country, and around the world. Only by knowing the signs will it be possible to take advantage of opportunities to free victims.
- ♥ Learn about human trafficking in your State and identify victims’ services available in your area. Lack of awareness about human trafficking and societal attitudes that perpetuate this problem result in lost opportunities to help victims escape from bondage.
- ♥ In homevisits, when appropriate, Vincentians can encourage those who may be aware of victims to seek help. Leave behind factsheets and local helpline information on human trafficking. (25)
- ♥ Talk about the trafficking of persons, even US citizens, and how slavery is contrary to Catholic Social Teaching and US law. Seek ways to open channels of communication and opportunities to work to eliminate this scourge.
- ♥ Be observant; keep eyes, ears, mind and heart open. Who is that person doing all the work, the one who’s never introduced; who is the battered cook with a badly burned hand in the back of the take-out kitchen; who is the person on the corner asking for work, or the one doing back-breaking jobs from morning to night with no lunch and no breaks.
- ♥ Seek ways to help victims of human trafficking in your community and work with survivors to call for change. (26)

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another. (23)

The scope and magnitude of modern-day slavery is shocking. Countless victims are lost in domestic servitude such as maids in private homes, servile marriages, migrant labor, restaurant and janitorial work, sweatshop factories, street peddling and begging, sexual exploitation (e.g. prostitution, exotic dancing), drug dealing, as child soldiers.... Some victims are even sold for the purpose of removing organs and/or body parts, a criminal act under the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol (27) — whatever benefits captors.

Advocacy Initiatives: Human Trafficking and Vincentian Action

1. Prevention: Link Immigration Reform with Awareness

- ♥ Support reauthorization of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) including adequate funding. While TVPA provides an important framework for countering human trafficking, better implementation is needed to effectively prosecute predators, protect survivors and prevent the continuation of human trafficking. Nations must be held accountable and cooperation amongst nations is needed to apprehend and prosecute traffickers.
- ♥ Ask Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform that provides legal avenues for men, women, and their families to enter the United States and work legally and safely. The undocumented seeking work are easy targets for human traffickers.
- ♥ Government, corporations and businesses must bear a moral responsibility and exert strong leadership by insisting on humane and lawful labor standards in their purchasing and for businesses throughout their supply chain. As consumers, we must hold businesses responsible for their actions.
- ♥ Encourage governments to work together to eradicate human trafficking networks and address the reasons that make persons vulnerable to traffickers such as extreme poverty, hunger, universal primary education, and gender equality. (Millennium Development Goals) Work for systemic change.
- ♥ Advocate for policies and programs which address human trafficking prevention. Give voice to the men, women and children whose poverty makes them vulnerable to traffickers. Call for increased educational efforts by local and national government so that all Americans are aware of this problem.

Only if we are aware of our calling, as individuals and as a community, to be part of God's family as his sons and daughters, will we be able to generate a new vision and muster new energy in the service of a truly integral humanism. The greatest service to development, then, is a Christian humanism that enkindles charity and takes its lead from truth, accepting both as a lasting gift from God. Openness to God makes us open towards our brothers and sisters and towards an understanding of life as a joyful task to be accomplished in a spirit of solidarity.

Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (28)

2. Detection: Identify and Free Trafficking Victims

- ♥ Support adequate training of health and social services providers, labor agencies and other first-line responders to recognize the signs of human trafficking, identify potential and actual victims and perpetrators. The lack of properly informed law enforcement officers, district attorneys and judges about human trafficking in the US impedes opportunities to arrest, prosecute and sentence traffickers under the law. Awareness and education are first steps.
- ♥ Advocate for increased media coverage (TV, radio, internet, etc.) on trafficking and provide various means for people to anonymously report trafficking and/or suspicion of trafficking without worrying about reprisals.

3. Legal Action: Justice for Victims and Expulsion of Predators

- ♥ Advocate for State Human Trafficking Trust Funds that provide forfeiture of proceeds from human trafficking. Without proper funding victims' chances of receiving help and escaping their captors is compromised. Seek to have forfeiture proceeds used to directly serve victims: housing and medical care, legal assistance, job training, mental health services, education, life skills training, and also a small portion should be used for training and education to combat and eliminate human trafficking.
- ♥ Provide effective tools to law enforcement and prosecutors to identify and prosecute traffickers, such as strengthening human trafficking laws. Support of strengthened laws to prosecute traffickers and protect victims.
- ♥ Victims need to know their rights. A trafficked victim's right to civil relief, for example, is not well known.

4. Recovery: Healing of Victims

- ♥ Protecting victims from their predators. Increase the number of federal T visa application approvals for victims.
- ♥ Call for more effective help for the victims of human trafficking with emphasis on the recovery and care of victims, legal protection, and social services as soon as possible. (For example, provide appropriate shelter space to support the needs of human trafficking victims is crucial.)
- ♥ There are many governmental and private agencies. Helping victims navigate the maze is crucial. Better collaboration and coordination, such as a designated local point-of-entry agency where victims can be directed to obtain the benefits and services needed to rebuild their lives.

Human trafficking violates the very foundation on which the United States was founded, which guarantees basic human rights. The US Dept of Health and Human Services (31) has human trafficking fact sheets in different languages and the US Dept of State's Trafficking in Persons Report 2009 further explains the challenges involved in this heinous crime.(32)

To report suspected human trafficking or for assistance, contact :

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (888) 373-7888 or
Joint U.S. Departments of Justice and Labor (888) 428-7581**

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their (Congress) jurisdiction.
Constitution of the United States (29)

Sadly, there are thousands who are trapped in various forms of enslavement, here in our country.... It is a debasement of our common humanity. President Barack Obama (30)

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (33)

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