



mission catalyst

Resources for Ministers from the BMS General Director

www.bmsworldmission.org/catalyst

March 2004

THIS ISSUE: MODERN SLAVERY

Dear Minister/Leader

Slavery ended many years ago. Names like William Wilberforce and BMS's own William Knibb played significant parts in its abolition in the British Empire and eventually everywhere. No longer would anyone be the property of another.

Or so I thought. Then, about ten years ago, I went to Mauritania where I met three young women, aged about 19 or 20. Each had been married some three times, always to men over 50 or even 60, who kept them as wives for a little time, then divorced them and they were passed on to others while they took new, young wives. The women had no freedom to leave their marriages, their immediate futures being handed on from man to man. In a nearby country I met tribal people who by custom – an enforced custom – had no choice but to serve another tribe.

More recently in Thailand I talked with women who were sold into sex slavery when very young, brutalised until they submitted to any desire of the customer, and thrown out when sick and unwanted. Now, some with small children, and aged still only 18 or 19, they were seriously ill. They've since died of Aids-related illnesses. From the Indian sub-continent I know stories of families forced into labour to pay debts. Except the debts will never be paid, and families have no choice but to offer their children for work so they can survive. And there are many, many other examples of bondage, some economic, some to addictions, some because people have been abducted, some pressed into a rebel army.

Slavery is an evil, a scourge on the earth. And it's happening in the 21st century. These things are not the stories of 1604, 1704, 1804 but 2004. And they're not getting better.

We need a new generation of abolitionists, campaigning against more diverse and more subtle forms of slavery. The evils we oppose are just as wicked as shipping shackled black people across oceans in appalling conditions. And, just as in past centuries, behind most of it lies vested interests with no intention of surrendering their wealth or power.

God grieves, and God calls his people to be informed, get involved, and speak up for the voiceless and act for the powerless. I hope this Mission Catalyst helps towards these ends.

Yours sincerely

Alistair Brown

No one shall be held in -slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

– Article 4, Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



Millions of children are exploited for cheap labour

Let there be justice for all. Let there be peace for all. Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all. Let each know that for each the body, the mind and the soul have been freed to fulfil themselves. Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world. Let freedom reign. The sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement! God bless Africa!

– Nelson Mandela,

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3: 28

Slavery today

There are 27 million people held in slavery in the world today. People oppressed by slavery tend to be from the poorest and most vulnerable social groups, often prevented from speaking out by fear and the need to survive. There are a few trends that may have contributed to the problem:

- The amount of people in the world has tripled over the past 50 years, with most of this growth taking place in the developing world.
- Millions of people have been displaced to urban centres and their outskirts due to rapid social and economic changes. This has left many people powerless and without job security, vulnerable to exploitation and slavery.
- Corruption in many of the world's governments allows slavery to go unpunished.

The main forms of modern slavery

Bonded labour

Bonded labour is the most commonly used method of enslavement. Labourers are forced, by threat or subjection to violence, to work long hours with no time off, for no payment. Bonded labour has existed for thousands of years and is the result of people taking or being tricked into taking a loan and having to work to repay the debt.

Forced labour

This form of slavery affects people who are illegally recruited by

governments, political parties or private individuals and forced to work under threat of violence or other penalty.

Child labour

Tens of millions of children around the world are forced into working full-time in dangerous and exploitative conditions, deprived of education and recreation vital to their personal and social development. Child slaves are employed in various types of work such as prostitution, agricultural work and as domestic servants.



Child soldiers forced to fight in areas of conflict

Human trafficking

Adults and children alike are

transported away from their homes and communities, by the threat or use of violence, deception or coercion, to be exploited as forced or enslaved workers.

Trafficking affects most countries, and is one of the most lucrative forms of international crime.

The problem is increasing due to factors such as the growing deprivation and marginalisation of the poor; discrimination against women; a lack of information about the realities and dangers of trafficking and insufficient penalties against traffickers. Trafficking is facilitated by globalisation, the transport and communications revolution and increasingly open borders.

Early or forced marriage

Women and girls are forced to marry and enter a life of servitude, often enduring physical violence from their husbands. In Malawi this practice, known as kupimbira, has resurfaced among tribes in the most remote and least developed areas. Desperate parents often force their daughters to marry creditors in order to repay their mounting debts.

Traditional or 'chattel' slavery

This is the form of slavery most familiar to us, when people are bought and sold as property, often after being abducted from their homes, inherited or given as gifts.

(Main source: Anti-slavery

Statistics

- The UN believes that the number of children trafficked annually, internally and externally, is around 1.2 million.
- The UN estimates that trafficking in persons generates \$7 to \$10 billion annually for traffickers.
- An estimated 179 million children work in the worst forms of child labour, which equates to one in eight of the world's 5 to 17-year-olds.
- There are almost 300,000 children working as soldiers involved in over 30 areas of conflict worldwide, some younger than ten years old.



Poor, rural communities are especially vulnerable to modern slavery

Bible reflection

Some things the Bible says puzzle me. Some things the Bible doesn't say also puzzle me. Slavery falls into the second category, but maybe because the Bible wasn't written to answer all our questions it doesn't have a helpful sound-bite condemnation of slavery, the kind preachers could quote easily. Its teaching – such as New Testament passages like Ephesians 6 or Philemon – deals pragmatically with slavery; how slaves or their masters should behave.

But God's anger about and opposition to exploitation and abuse are very clear: a fearful fate lay in store for those who oppressed the poor and crushed the needy (Amos 4: 1). Nor does God recognise the apartheid-like divisions of human-kind, where one section of society rule over another. There is no Jew or Greek, no slave or free, no male or female. All are equal in Christ (Gal 3: 28).

Oppression is outlawed. Using

words from Isaiah 61, Jesus included releasing the oppressed as part of his ministry (Luke 4: 18). And that wasn't just work for Jesus. No Christian can escape the commission to "loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke." (Isa 58: 6)

The Bible is pragmatic, but leaves no room for

complacency about slavery for those who have come to know a God of love, fairness and justice.

Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labour.

Jeremiah 22:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.

Luke 4: 18



Trafficking results in a life on the streets for many children

Case study – Sex slavery in Thailand

Sex tourism is a growing industry in Thailand, and as a result an estimated 35,000 people are living as sex slaves in the country. Extreme poverty in northern Thailand means that some families sell their daughters to 'job brokers' under the false promise of respectable, well-paying jobs in southern cities, either as maids or factory workers. Families receive a loan in return for their daughters and repayment comes in the form of debt bondage. The girls are taken to brothels where they are held captive and forced to work servicing up to 20 men a night. They are often released after three to five years of work, by which time their bodies are so mutilated they are no longer useful as prostitutes. Many have HIV or Aids. Some girls try to return to their villages, but are seen as 'unclean' and become social outcasts.

Domestic slavery in Paris

Saran was brought to Paris five years ago from Mauritania by a trafficker who had promised her a better life, an education and a respectable job working for a rich Parisian family. She was only 15 years old. On arrival in France she was forced to care for her master's home 18 hours a day, seven days a week. She slept on the cold floor of the cellar, where she was locked up at night to prevent her escape. After four years of slavery, Saran was 'set free' as she was no longer needed. She was left to fend for herself on the streets of Paris with no language skills, no friends, no money and an uncertain future. This is not a unique story – involuntary servitude in France is increasing, and there may be as many as 3,000 domestic slaves in Paris. Domestic slavery is difficult to detect and prosecute, with the public largely unaware of the problem and many cases occurring behind closed doors.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

– Martin Luther King Jr, letter from the Birmingham jail, 16 April 1963

On our doorstep – slavery in the UK

A recent report entitled 'Stop the Traffic' has been published by UNICEF UK as part of their 'End Child Exploitation' campaign. The report reveals how the face of trafficking in the UK has changed over the past five years. How much we really know about the situation is unclear. According to reports from social services, NGOs, police and Immigration Control, at least 250 children are known to have been trafficked into the UK in the past five years. In reality it is likely to be a much higher figure but accurate statistics are very difficult to obtain. In the UK today there is a wide range of African nationalities being trafficked, with victims originating in countries where recent conflict has led to children becoming more vulnerable to traffickers. Girls in many African countries have lower status than boys and are therefore more likely to be trafficked. Families

are tricked into thinking their child will be taken to a safe place and given a good job or education, and will be able to improve their chances in life and send money back home. Children arrive in the UK to a life of exploitation, most commonly in prostitution, but some are also forced to work as domestic servants, drug mules, beggars, sweatshop and restaurant workers, drug dealers and in credit card fraud. Children are sometimes taken into the care of social services. However, driven by fear, they often flee to their traffickers or are abducted. There may well be hundreds, or even thousands, of children in the UK who have been brought here for exploitation. Until the necessary monitoring mechanisms have been implemented in the UK, the full extent of the problem cannot be known. (Main source: 'Stop the traffic' published by UNICEF UK)

There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

Deuteronomy 15: 11



Children in Nepal recruited to fight as Maoist soldiers

Useful websites

www.unhchr.ch/html/menu6/2/fs14.htm

Fact sheet on contemporary forms of slavery by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

www.antislavery.org

Website of Anti-Slavery International, contains educational resources, latest news and campaign information.

www.freetheslaves.net

Contains personal stories, latest news and information about slavery today.

www.iabolish.com

American anti-slavery group, containing latest news, country reports and campaign information.

www.amnesty.org

Official website of Amnesty International, contains updated reports of modern slavery.

www.un.org

Official website of the United Nations, contains statistics and information about contemporary forms of slavery.

www.guardian.co.uk

Official website of The Guardian newspaper, containing news reports of slavery around the world and trafficking in the UK. Search for 'human trafficking' and 'modern forms of slavery'.

Developments magazine, third quarter 2003 (issue 23).

Published by the Department for International Development.

UNICEF UK's 'Stop the traffic' report, focuses on the issue of child trafficking. Published July 2003, available from

www.endchildexploitation.org.uk/pdf/ct/UKtraffickingreportfinal.pdf

Compiled by the General Director and Researcher Emma Pulley