

# *Pro-Life* PERSPECTIVE

## Backgrounder on Human Trafficking

*“Human trafficking is an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ. It is a crime against humanity.”*

— Pope Francis, April 10, 2014

### What is Human Trafficking?

The United Nations Protocol on Human Trafficking defines human trafficking as

*the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability.<sup>1</sup>*

Human trafficking takes a variety of forms in every region of the world. Some adults and children are trafficked for prostitution and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation. Other individuals are trafficked for forced labor in agriculture, sweat shops, fishing crews, and domestic servitude or are trapped in situations of bonded labor or debt bondage. Some children may be lawfully and forcibly recruited as child soldiers by armed forces, as combatants or for other forms of labor.

The essence of human trafficking is the denial of personal freedoms. Human trafficking can include, but does not require, movement. People may be considered trafficking victims regardless of whether they were born into a state of servitude, were transported to the exploitative situation, previously consented to work for a trafficker, or participated in a crime as a direct result of being trafficked. The common denominator is the goal of exploitation through coercion and/or force.

### Human Trafficking around the Globe

According to the US Department of State, every country in the world is affected by trafficking and there are an estimated 20 million individuals living in slavery today globally.<sup>2</sup> The United Nations *2012 Estimate on Forced Labor* from the International Labor Organization provides some shocking statistics on the prevalence of human trafficking worldwide<sup>3</sup>:

- Of the estimated 20 million victims of trafficking and human slavery worldwide, 9.1 million victims (44 percent) have been trafficked internally or internationally.
- 11.8 million are subjected to forms of modern slavery in their place of origin or residence within their own national borders.
- Nearly 1.5 million victims are currently laboring in conditions of forced labor, sexual exploitation, and servitude in the United States, Canada, and developed countries of the EU.
- Fifty-five percent of forced labor victims are women and girls, as are 98 percent of sex trafficking victims.
- Children aged 17 years and below represent 26 percent of total victims and a total of 5.5 million child victims worldwide.

In May 2014, the International Labor Organization (ILO) found that forced labor in the global private economy generates illegal profits of \$150 billion per year.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the ILO found that almost two-thirds of the total profits,

approximately \$99 billion, came from commercial sexual exploitation; and roughly \$50 billion was derived from forced economic labor, such as domestic work, construction, and mining.

## What Is the Church's Teaching About Human Trafficking?

The Catholic Church has long spoken out against the depravity of human trafficking and slavery. During Vatican II, the Catholic Church reaffirmed its historic concern about forced labor, stating that “slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions where [people] are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons” are “infamies”<sup>5</sup> and according to Pope John Paul II are “an affront to fundamental values . . . values rooted in the very nature of the human person.”<sup>6</sup>

St. John Paul II, in a letter on the occasion of the International Conference on “Twenty-First-Century Slavery—the Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings,” stated that human trafficking

*constitutes a shocking offense against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights. . . . In particular, the sexual exploitation of women and children is a particularly repugnant aspect of this trade, and must be recognized as an intrinsic violation of human dignity and human rights.*<sup>7</sup>

Lastly, Pope Francis has extensively spoken about the need to end modern day slavery. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he states:

*I have always been distressed at the lot of those who are victims of various kinds of human trafficking. How I wish that all of us would hear God's cry: “Where is your brother?” (Gen 4:9). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labor? Let us not look the other way.*

## Notes

- 1 UN General Assembly, *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, §3a, November 15, 2000, available at [www.refworld.org/docid/4720706c0.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/4720706c0.html).
- 2 Secretary of State John Kerry, Remarks at the 2014 TIP Report Release, June 20, 2014, available at [www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/06/228083.htm](http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/06/228083.htm).
- 3 International Labor Organization, *2012 Global Estimate of Forced Labor* (Geneva, Switzerland: International Labor Organization), [www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms\\_181921.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_181921.pdf).
- 4 *Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labor*, ILO, May 2014.
- 5 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 27, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966).
- 6 Pope John Paul II, Letter on the Occasion of the International Conference on “Twenty-First-Century Slavery—the Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings,” May 15, 2002.
- 7 Pope John Paul II, Letter on the Occasion of the International Conference on “Twenty-First Century Slavery,” May 15, 2002.

*Backgrounder prepared by Migration and Refugee Service, Office of Migration Policy and Public Affairs, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and originally posted on the USCCB website under the title “Church and Human Trafficking.”*