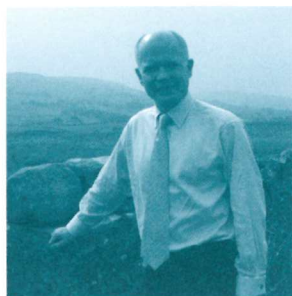


HUMAN TRAFFICKING: THE MODERN SLAVE TRADE

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I FIRST BEGAN TO LEARN ABOUT NEW FORMS OF SLAVERY WHEN ASKED TO SPEAK ON THIS SUBJECT IN JANUARY 2005. I SOON DISCOVERED THAT FROM THE VILLAGES OF AFRICA TO THE FARMS, SWEATSHOPS AND BROTHELS OF SOUTH ASIA AND THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT, SLAVERY STILL FLOURISHES. Slaves

harvest cocoa and other crops in Ivory Coast, mine diamonds in Sierra Leone and are forced into domestic servitude in Latin America. In addition, hundreds of young children are kidnapped each year and forced to become soldiers for rebel fighters in war zones like Liberia and the Congo. But this kind of exploitation is not exclusive to the developing world.

Closer to home slavery lies further below the surface but is there nonetheless: people are trafficked from country to country within Europe, undetected by state authorities, as part of a thriving and profitable trade, but one which deals in the same misery as more traditional forms of slavery. I have read about intricate networks of approachers, transporters, middle men, storehouses and trafficking routes, and encountered heartrending accounts by the victims themselves. The scale of the problem is, undeniably, huge: a recent report from the UN Office of Drugs and Crime concludes that no country in the entire world is immune to human trafficking, be it as a country of origin, destination or transit. After narcotics, it equals arms dealing as the second largest criminal industry in the world and is the fastest growing. It is closely connected with other illegal activities such as money laundering, drugs trafficking and document forgery and is estimated by the FBI to generate around \$9.5 billion a year in revenue. On a human-scale the statistics are worse still: approximately 600,000 to 800,000 men, women and children are trafficked across international borders each year, 80 per cent are women and girls, while 50 per cent are children.

The most common practice in Europe is in the trafficking of young girls and women for the purpose of sexual exploitation. One harrowing example is the story of Eleina, a young Lithuanian girl, aged 15, who came to the UK on the false promise of a summer job selling ice-cream. Instead, upon arrival in the country, her passport was seized and she was herded from brothel to brothel by multiple gangs and individuals. In total, she was sold a staggering seven times in just three months. Reflecting upon her ordeal she said, 'I have run out of tears ... I try to forget but sometimes I have nightmares about it.'

Other victims are forced into productive labour, or used for other purposes such as benefit fraud and organ

donation. Pregnant women are highly prized as their babies can be bought and sold for thousands of pounds in the developed world.

It is therefore obvious that human-trafficking is an industry which uses a variety of cruel methods and practices. Many victims, like Eleina, start their journeys by falling casualty to the deceit of seemingly respectable individuals who offer work and opportunity in far-off places. They travel of their own freewill to the promised destination only to find that lying in wait are the organised criminal gangs ready to exploit them. Violence and intimidation are frequently used to control victims in environments where they find themselves cut-off from the protection of family members and community, language and culture, many miles from home.

So, why is human-trafficking, in all its forms, on the increase? One reason is globalisation. Economic barriers have fallen, borders have become more porous, travel has become cheaper and technology more advanced. We have greater mobility and freedom than ever before, resulting in exceptionally diverse, fluid and fast-moving labour markets. This provides the environment necessary for criminal organisations to run networks of human traffic across national boundaries, to unprecedented levels.

In Europe, the tearing down of the iron curtain, along with the expansion of the European Union, has further increased this labour mobility; it is easier to cross national boundaries either legitimately or illegally. As the disparities between developing and developed countries increase, market forces draw workers long distances to benefit from the great differentials in wages compared to home. War and conflict across many parts of the world have also created a large pool of displaced people. Individuals are thus willing to travel great distances in search of opportunity at considerable personal risk; not least from the criminal gangs who wish to exploit the same market openings.

As Moises Naim, editor of *Foreign Policy* magazine comments in his book *Illicit*, 'Smuggling is no longer what crooks do between two countries across borders. Now we are talking about large, wealthy, ruthless, global, agile networks that are undermining governance, democracy and governmental functioning in many countries.'¹

REFLECTIONS ON WILBERFORCE

Having examined the magnitude of the problem before us, it would help to reflect upon the extraordinary achievements of William Wilberforce who, 200 years

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ago, led, and eventually won, the moral argument to outlaw the British slave trade, despite powerful economic and political opposition. We can then draw an obvious parallel with the situation we find today. The strength of commercial opposition faced by Wilberforce betrayed the levels of unscrupulous profit that were made in the nineteenth century from enslaving others. We may conclude that these powerful economic forces have always existed, to a greater or lesser extent ever since, and indeed have grown stronger in recent years as market opportunities have increased. In the twenty-first century, just as in the eighteenth and nineteenth, moral revulsion can mobilise public opinion, but now, we are fighting slavery in a different form: this is a trade which is illegal, underground and has the potential to weaken governments and the rule of law. To reduce the trade in human beings we must disrupt the market forces of demand and supply: make the rewards less lucrative, increase the risks of capture and reduce the demand.

COMBATING THE NEW SLAVERY – A FEW RECOMMENDATIONS

Since early 2005 the government has been proactive in their attempt to combat human trafficking. They established a Ministerial Group on Human Trafficking to coordinate and ensure cross-departmental policy, and produced a public consultation paper in January 2006 with a National Action Plan to be published towards the end of this year.

They also launched Operation Pentameter, a successful three month project to tackle trafficking for sexual exploitation involving all 55 police forces across the UK. They rescued 84 women, forced to work against their will in brothels and massage parlours, originating from countries as diverse as Albania, China, Iran and Rwanda. Shockingly, twelve of these victims were aged between 14 and 17. Furthermore, a UK Human Trafficking Centre was established last autumn to support, develop, co-ordinate and deliver the UK's policing response to trafficking in human beings.

All these initiatives are to be welcomed but in the meantime, the problem of human trafficking into the UK has shown no sign of improvement, and, worryingly, appears to have got worse. Cases have been documented in Britain's biggest cities, rural towns and quiet suburbs and it is clear that a more holistic and concerted response is required to make any headway in combating trafficking at home and abroad. For this reason the Conservative Party launched its own set of proposals in January 2007 to tackle the modern-day

trade in human beings and we will be doing everything we can to ensure that they are adopted and implemented by the government.

1. Understand the problem

First, more research is required to understand the nature of the problem in the UK. What is it that makes our country, alongside countries such as Germany and Italy, a primary destination in Europe for traffickers? Are criminal sentences an inadequate deterrent, the odds of detection too low, the conviction rates too poor, or the demand for services too high? Or is it a combination of all these factors? Due to the subversive nature of the crime, it is difficult to calculate how many people have been trafficked to the UK, but it should be possible to compile more accurate data than we have at present. A comprehensive and independent research report on the extent of human trafficking must be undertaken.

2. Stringent law enforcement

In terms of reducing the supply-side of trafficking, we must act to decrease the profits and increase the risks for traffickers. Combating supply must be embedded in policing priorities, with the impetus coming from the very top and filtering down to all levels of law enforcement. A UK Border Police Force with specialist expertise for intercepting traffickers and victims at our borders would help to remove the financial incentives from this lucrative trade and is an idea that has been supported by many senior policemen, including Lord Stevens and Sir Ian Blair. Separate interviews at all airports for women and children travelling alone with an adult who is not a parent, guardian or partner, a practice which is widely used in America, would also help identify potential victims, as would the simple instruction to immigration officials to check the date on the return ticket of the adult accompanying minors.

Due to the international dimension of trafficking, we must ensure that there is greater co-operation between our government and police force with those from overseas – especially countries of origin. Many source-countries lack the judicial infrastructure and law-enforcement capacity to stem the trade and in these instances, sharing expertise in areas such as police-training and intelligence-gathering, and techniques to fight organised crime, is vital. Within Europe, pressure can also be brought to bear on countries wishing to join the European Union, with the effectiveness of law-enforcement measures made a strict criterion for entry.

NOTES

1. Moises Naim, *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers and Copycats Are Hijacking the Global Economy* (London: William Heinemann, 2006), quoted in the *Miami Herald*, 2 January 2006.

'Slavery is still found in every corner of the globe'

► 3. Empowering those at risk

Another approach to reducing supply which can be achieved by working closely with source countries is to educate, empower and protect vulnerable individuals within those countries. For example, last year, Austrian embassies and consulates in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine began issuing special information about the dangers of forced prostitution to women who applied for visas intending to work in vocations that are deemed to be at risk from criminal activity. The women are also required to apply for visas in person. Information programmes can be implemented at very little cost with considerable benefit: two years ago the Estonian government sponsored an essay writing competition for young people titled, 'How could I fall into the hands of traffickers?' Elsewhere, the government of Bangladesh has distributed anti-trafficking material to members of micro-lending schemes. This demonstrates the valuable relationship between anti-trafficking campaigns and broader economic and social development projects in developing countries.

A longer-term solution is to encourage academic and economic opportunities in developing countries where human-trafficking is an endemic problem. In Nepal, a country in which the trafficking of girls to India for prostitution is prevalent, an educational charity works with girls from rural villages, laying the groundwork of empowerment. It provides basic skills in reading and mathematics, and girls are also taught about the dangers of trafficking, prostitution and other forms of abuse. The benefits of such a programme are far-reaching as parents can learn from their daughters. As one mother commented, 'Now the people who sell girls cannot trick us because our eyes have opened – now they cannot do as they did in the past.'

4. Reduce demand

Governments instinctively rely on the usual and most readily available tools they have at their disposal to tackle human trafficking; protecting national borders and law enforcement. But human trafficking must not be viewed solely as organised immigration crime as it is much more complex than that. Many victims travel to the UK with their own passports, which are then seized by the traffickers upon arrival.

Curbing demand is just as crucial, if not more so in the long-term. But it requires informing, educating and persuading both consumers and employers in both legal and illegal markets, where slave labour is used. In the

UK, Operation Pentameter sent out campaign letters giving advice on how to recognise a trafficked woman and the immorality of sleeping with one to men's magazines. Leaflets were also handed out to men going to the World Cup. In Australia they have gone further: the federal police are running a campaign to encourage people who purchase sexual services to call a special hotline number anonymously if they believe any women they have come across are being forced to work as prostitutes.

5. Protect victims

Finally, a great deal needs to be done in terms of victim protection. The Conservative Party has urged the government to sign the Council of Europe's Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, which guarantees victims to a 30-day reflection period and we are delighted that after much procrastination, it agreed to sign and ratify the convention last month.

In other areas victim support is woefully inadequate. Currently there are no free specialised help-lines for victims to call and there is only one government scheme, the Poppy Project, providing safe accommodation for 25 females who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation. Basic levels of medical assistance and counselling must also be increased to enable victims to recover both physically and psychologically from their often traumatic ordeals.

The policies I have mentioned are just a few ideas on how the market forces of supply and demand can be obstructed. They reflect the breadth of measures that are available and required, domestically and internationally, to tackle a criminal activity that is growing both in volume and complexity.

CONCLUSION

There are many countries today where slavery is either tolerated or masked by corruption and greed. As we approach the bicentenary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, we are reminded of the tremendous achievement of William Wilberforce and his colleagues and of our responsibility to uphold and protect the moral legacy that he, and others, laid down for us.

Slavery is still found in every corner of the globe, under many different guises, and employs all kinds of deceitful and violent methods to subjugate people for profit. The task for us all is to ensure that we do not ignore an age-old problem which sometimes lies out of sight, but nevertheless still blights the lives of many thousands of vulnerable people in this country, and around the world. ■