

Protection of Human Rights

Human Trafficking

The presence of East Asian human trafficking victims in places as far-removed as Southern Africa and Central and South America confirm the ease with which modern merchants of slavery exploit international air travel.

Children have been documented as trafficked to the U.S. from Burma, Hong Kong, India, Korea, China, Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cameroon, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Canada, Mexico, Bosnia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russia and Ukraine.

Each year more than two million children are exploited in the global commercial sex trade, some of them as young as 5 years old, with the average age of 14. Child sex tourism is an organized multimillion dollar industry using tour guides, websites and brothel maps. End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT-USA) estimates that about 25% of the men who sexually exploit children abroad are from the U.S. and Canada.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 is a reauthorization of the landmark 2000 human trafficking bill. Before the bill passed, a provision requiring a trafficking watchdog at the Pentagon was deleted. Five defense contractor lobbying groups, representing some of the industry's biggest names, such as DynCorp International and former Halliburton subsidiary KBR, both of which have been linked to trafficking concerns, said implementation overseas is unrealistic. KBR, an engineering and construction company, uses more than 200 subcontractors but doesn't make itself responsible for how workers are recruited. Workers pay substantial fees, and fraud, coercion and seizure of passports are common.

War zones are ideal as both sources and transit routes for trafficking: women are economically and physically vulnerable, and the absence of border patrols may make transit through them easy, requiring mainly the collusion of local military, militia or war lords. The abduction and sale of women and girls often becomes an important source of income, along with drugs and weapons, with which to finance the conflict and may be safer and more lucrative.

The H-2A program began with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which created a class of guest worker H2 visas. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act created the H-2A category specifically for agricultural workers; professional skilled workers get H-1B visas and unskilled non-agriculture workers get H-2B visas. The H-2A program makes them fully dependent on the employer who recruited them and paid for their transport. If they quit or are fired, they must leave the U.S. Program regulations state only that workers must be paid the prevailing wage in their industry, and the Labor Department claims it lacks authority to enforce even that. Federal prosecutors exposed weaknesses in the guest worker visa program as

recently as May, when they announced human trafficking charges in Kansas City against the leaders of the Giant Labor Solutions conspiracy. Guest workers make chocolate in Louisiana, staff hotel desks in Florida, and mow lawns in Missouri. They toil in some of the country's most difficult and dangerous industries, from shipbuilding to asbestos removal to forestry.

The Tariff Act of 1930 prohibits importation of goods made with forced labor. However, despite the growing body of evidence of forced labor in global corporate supply chains, the Department of Homeland Security has not stopped the importation of goods made through forced labor.

The Mission Statement of the Human Trafficking Sub-Committee of Human Rights, Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility states:

We, as members of the Human Trafficking Sub-Committee in conjunction with the Promoting Human Rights Working Group, believe that every human being is created in the image of God. The dignity of the human person must be respected and protected. We believe that the promotion and protection of human rights are minimum standards for all social institutions, including companies. We commit to address the human rights abuses involved in child sexual tourism and trafficked persons. Therefore, we undertake the work of promoting corporate policies and practices that ensure respect for the basic human rights of all peoples.

The investor work includes collaborations with ECPAT-USA and the Department of State G-TIP (trafficking in persons) office.

Addressing the impact of companies on human trafficking supports the care and concern of the Sisters of Mercy for women and children.

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