

Workshop Paper:

Venue: Pastoral Centre. Diocese of San Bernadino, California, USA

Topic: The evil of human trafficking (HT) and discussions on how this could be checked and prevented

Topic presented: Understanding Human Trafficking and Its Obscurity
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Human Trafficking: A New Slavery in the Contemporary Century - Short Historical Perspective

In discussing the origin or emergence of human trafficking there is the need to underline the fact that human trafficking is different from prostitution. While trafficking in human beings involves prostitution, prostitution does not necessarily mean human trafficking. The subject of human trafficking as we have it today crystallised in such a form because of the abolition of slave trade which began in the 18th Century (Huland 2012). The drafting of the Universal Human Rights led to the abolition of slavery with Germany and Saudi Arabia prohibiting slavery in 1948 and 1962 respectively (Huland 2012, p. 65).¹ The old form of slavery was abolished and the new form of it, which is human trafficking, started.

There were traces of slavery in the ancient times and there were many other reasons why people leave their lands *en masse* for other places (Neumayer 2009, online version). In the Bronze and Iron eras there were migrations that were sometimes forced and sometimes not forced. In the classical times many were driven away from their lands because of their beliefs or culture (Neumayer 2009, online version). The prosperity of many Empires in the early times like Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek and Roman Empires initiated the idea of pulling labourers forcefully to handle their needed manual labour in those days (Schmidt 2013, online version). In effect forceful and voluntary movement of people away from their homes had already assumed a stage before the idea of doing business with human beings began. However, "trafficking in persons was a violation against humanity 200 years ago, as it still is today." (Kangaspunta 2010, online version, p. 3).

The practice of human slavery did not end with the ancient Greece and Roman empires but continued with the enslavement of the Africans by the colonial masters. "Most countries in Africa were freed from colonial rule only in the latter half of the twentieth century." (Shelley

¹ See also Hellie, R. 2003. "Slavery". In: Encyclopaedia Britannica 2003. Deluxe Edition CD-ROM.

2010, p. 266). The pre-colonial and colonial slave trade in Africa had its origin in West Africa where the slaves that were either bought or captured in hinterlands were shipped to Europe and America. More than 12 million Africans were transported to America through the transatlantic slave trade route that lasted over 400 years (Hanano 2006, online version). These were exploited and made to work under the worst of conditions. There were other slaves who were not shipped abroad but were meant to stay back in Africa and work for the benefit of the white colonial masters under sub-human conditions. When the old slavery stopped the modern-day slavery (human trafficking) began in spite of the fact that slavery was prohibited by all the countries. "In Africa, an illegal slave trade continued in the Red Sea region during the first third of the twentieth century after the introduction of antislavery patrols by the colonial powers." (Suzanne 2003, in Shelley 2010, p. 273).

Human trafficking can be termed 'a modern day slavery' which in its complexity and dynamism ends up in the exploitation of the victims for the personal gains of a person or group of persons. Being one of the fastest growing international criminal business activities, and ranking behind illicit drug (substance abuse) and arms deals (Human Right Watch 2001), human trafficking focuses more on women and children. This is often because their vulnerability in society renders them easy prey to exploitation. A majority of the victims, especially women, end up in the sex industries.

Human trafficking can happen within a country or across the borders. In most cases people are transported from the so-called underdeveloped to supposedly developed regions. As a result, women and girls are smuggled yearly from underdeveloped countries to Europe and America.

There are variations in the root causes of trafficking. These are sometimes dependent on regional and cultural backgrounds. However some root causes are traceable to social/economic inequality, negative effects of globalization, political instability, and the greed of the traffickers.

The crime of human trafficking is one that poses an extensive threat to the global community and should be seen as a challenge by all stakeholders at different levels. Conceptions of measures towards combating the crime should be in the direction of applying the international rights which anchor in the national laws to the victims. Above all, the empowerment of the group that is usually affected should be considered and planned by the national and international bodies. The road towards a solution to this problem should point to the international human right laws and to the national adaptations and implementation of them.

Human trafficking should remain a very important theme within the human rights discussions. However, the institutional and judicial adaptation of these rights within the international and national legal systems has shown a lot of flaws.

This workshop is a contribution towards a better understanding of the nature of the international crime of human trafficking. It is an impulse towards finding a new way at the international levels, and encouraging cooperation among nations in the fight against international human trafficking and its root causes.