

humanity.

THE GREATEST MORAL TRAGEDY OF OUR TIME

THE CRIME OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The statistics are alarming, the reach is global, and the impact is devastating. *Nicole Partridge* and *Deborah Johnson* report on a shameful crime which enslaves millions . . .

Zoe* couldn't believe her luck. After months of unemployment, the university graduate had landed an exciting job in the cosmopolitan city of Athens. Although it had been difficult to wrench herself away from her loving family and circle of close friends, poor job prospects had forced the 21 year old to leave her small home town in Eastern Europe in search of work.

Thrilled by the bustling city and the opportunities ahead of her, she quickly met and befriended a Ukrainian woman who offered her a steady job in a local bar. All you had to do was wait on tables and talk to people, her new friend told her. The first two weeks were easy—Zoe did her job well, met new people and the trust between the two women grew.

Then, towards the end of a particularly busy shift, she was asked to join her friend upstairs. An unusual request she thought, but she had no reason to suspect anything was wrong. Within moments, she was led into a dark room where she was violently raped.





Still reeling in shock and powerless to stop the unfolding nightmare, Zoe was taken from the bar and transported into a seedy underworld of violence and prostitution. For three years, she was forced to work in brothel after brothel violated by dozens of men every single day.

The cause of slavery

Zoe's story is just the tip of the iceberg in the growing global epidemic that is human trafficking. Take her experience and multiply it by millions and you start to understand the magnitude of a crime described as the great moral crisis of our time. According to the United Nations, the buying and selling of people is one of the most lucrative forms of international crime, next to the drugs and arms trade. It touches every nation in the world and generates more than US\$31 billion each year.

In 1807, the great abolitionist William Wilberforce led the crusade to end slavery, but 200 years on, there are more slaves than at any other time in history. Today, an estimated 27 million people live in slavery. At least 800,000 more are trafficked across international borders each year, reports the US State Department.

Unscrupulous traffickers target the vulnerable, luring those like Zoe with false hopes of a better life. Their victims end up in sweatshops, brothels and domestic servitude, held captive indefinitely by fear and violence.

"Human trafficking is caused by many factors, the greatest being extreme poverty," explains CEO of World Vision Australia Tim Costello. "This has been intensified by the global financial crisis.

On top of this, we live in a consumer-driven world. A lot of the products we unwittingly end up with have used trafficked labour in their production," he says, stressing the importance of making informed consumer choices.

"We often hear about the really dramatic end of sex prostitution, but people are trafficked into many industries besides brothels," he adds.

Girls and boys, women and men of all ages are forced to toil in the rug loom sheds of Nepal, sell their bodies in the brothels of Rome, break rocks in the quarries of Pakistan and fight wars in the jungles of Africa, writes US abolitionist and author David Batstone in his acclaimed slave trade exposé *Not For Sale*¹.

Speaking at Hillsong Conference recently as part of his backyard abolitionist tour, David revealed that trafficking is an issue even in our own neighbourhoods. Victims are being smuggled through NSW ports, others are forced into unpaid work in restaurants in Adelaide and young girls are sold into prostitution in Sydney and Melbourne, he told delegates.

"If we all committed ourselves to local action, we could have a universally distributed movement that fights trafficking," says David.

Crossing the street

International speaker Christine Caine, who describes herself as militant in her own fight against trafficking, made the decision in 2007 to get personally involved. "I recall walking through the airport at Thessaloniki, Greece. I saw posters of young children on the walls. I found out that these kids were the alleged victims of human trafficking. After more research, which included reading the book *Not For Sale*, I didn't want to simply say 'someone should do something'. That is when we chose to be that someone and founded The A21 Campaign."

Working with the Greek authorities, abolitionist agencies and lawyers, The A21 Campaign aims to raise awareness and abolish injustice. At a grass roots level, Christine opened a rescue shelter in Thessaloniki in December 2008, where trafficked victims are offered physical, legal, emotional and spiritual support.

"Out of all of the justice projects on the earth, this is the one that keeps me awake at night," says Christine, whose inspiration came from Isaiah 58 and the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. "I felt like one of the religious people who crossed the street," she admits. "I saw the posters and I walked on by, too busy going to my crusades and Christian

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS CAUSED BY MANY FACTORS, THE GREATEST BEING EXTREME POVERTY"

FIND OUT MORE

The A21 Campaign:

www.thea21campaign.org

Not For Sale:

www.notforsalecampaign.org

She Rescue Home:

www.sherescuehome.org

World Vision:

www.worldvision.com.au/

Issues

The Salvation Army:

www.salvos.org.au



“THE BUYING AND SELLING OF PEOPLE IS ONE OF THE MOST LUCRATIVE FORMS OF INTERNATIONAL CRIME”

meetings. Then one day, I decided to stop being too busy. I crossed the street to help.”

Another person who crossed the street is Leigh Ramsey, Pastor of Brisbane’s Citipointe Church and founder of the She Rescue Home in Phnom Penh. Prompted by God and armed with her own research, she took her first trip to Cambodia where she became aware of the buying and selling of children. “I was incensed that these children who were being bought and sold had no voice and horrified that I had never heard about it. How could I have lived this long in my safe environment, while this was going on?”

Challenged to step out of her comfort zone, Leigh returned home with a vision to start a God-centred rescue home. With the generous support of her church, she was able to establish a safe house for young girls aged six to 16.

“Each one of these girls has a story,” says Leigh, sharing the heart-wrenching account of a six year old girl who was sold for \$300 by her neighbour while her mother was at work. “The mother came home, discovered her little girl was missing and frantically called the police. She was sold several times and thankfully found before it was too late.

“She was completely traumatised,” recalls Leigh. “She had been locked in cupboards and dark hallways. It took time and love to restore her trust.”

Together we can make a difference

While Leigh and her church have a vision for rescuing and restoring others around the world, she admits they are taking one step at a time. And her encouragement to women? “If enough of us stand up and shout out about this, people will eventually stop and take notice.”

Christine Caine agrees. “I can see a global sisterhood

Be Inspired

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed.”
(Pro 31:8 NLT)

“Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people.”
(Is 58:6 NLT)

HOW YOU CAN RESPOND

PRAY for victims’ freedom and the protection of those rescuing them

WATCH movies like *Taken*, *Trade*, *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Human Trafficking*. Read *Not for Sale*, revealing the extent of human trafficking

LEARN more about this crime. Look up the links below to see who’s doing what

SUPPORT aid agencies involved in the rescue and rehabilitation of victims. All organisations need funds to fight this injustice

TELL others. Raising awareness is the number one weapon against human trafficking, the UN says. Those who know about it are less vulnerable and they are empowered to act

lending a voice to this kind of issue,” she declares. “One person can’t do much, but together we can make a huge difference—Zoe is testament to this.

“When I first met Zoe at our shelter, she was flinching, cowering, eyes cast down, fearful of any man who walked into the room,” recalls Christine.

“She had been stripped of her dignity.”

“Today, Zoe is a different girl,” enthuses Christine. “She has been lovingly restored by our team and by the church. It’s taken time, but finally she is smiling again and it’s not because she’s being told to.” **CW**

*Names and some information have been changed to protect privacy.

1. D Batstone, *Not for Sale: The return of the global slave trade—and how we can fight it*, HarperCollins, 2007

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