

Reflection on Human Trafficking

by Gail Mengel

I watched the DVD *Fields of Mudan* in an ecumenical meeting a year ago with other women executive ministers. We watched in silence while our tears flowed and our hearts ached. The DVD is a portrayal of a small girl child's experience in being taken from her home and forced into prostitution-modern day slavery.

Each of us was aware of the trafficking issues and yet this story played out on a screen brought the issue very close and personal. It put a beautiful, young and innocent face before us and we watched this young girl with other children caught in the ugly world of sexual trafficking. She was told she was paying a debt for her family.

That day impacted me and I could not help but think of my precious granddaughters who look so much like the age of the young girl. I realized that we need more than to simply be aware of this deplorable problem, and instead be part of the solution to bring about an end to human slavery. This is not easy and good men and women have tried for generations to make life better, safer, healthier and more secure for everyone.

Sixty years ago the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world."

Six decades later gross violations of the declaration continue. Human trafficking, or modern day slavery, is becoming the most practiced crime in the world. Slavery did not end with the Emancipation Proclamation or the United Nations Declaration. It is back and preying on innocent children and young women. Girls and boys as far away as Laos and as near as your city are being bought and sold into the tragic underworld of human trafficking.

It is estimated that 27 million slaves exist in our world today. Traffickers swiftly move to take advantage of tragedies like the Myanmar disaster to sweep up abandoned children and destitute women. Over 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders every year, and more and more are coming into the United States—70% are female and 50% are under the age of 18.

People followed God's call to help end slavery in the 19th Century in this country. But slavery is still an issue in the world today, and in the spirit of all faith groups, we must respond! Can we find ways to end this horrific problem? They are real children and young people with hopes and dreams like our own children. FaithTrust Institute has stood like a lighthouse offering help

to the abused, accountability for the violators, and training for those who believe in transforming life and creating a better world. Who is waiting for our help and who can we save?

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Commentaries

Muslim Perspective

It seems to me that a young girl being forced into prostitution might feel as if a part of her soul is being killed each time she is violated. God reminds us of the sacredness of human life in all of our religious texts. The Qur'an, like the Bible, prohibits murder, all forms of injustice, and urges the believers to fight for freedom from oppression. The enslavement of a human being, stripped of those rights endowed by the Creator and deprived of his or her voice, seems no different to me than the taking of that life. Each of us must find a way to speak up and speak out in our respective contexts to save these innocent lives.

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Jewish Perspective

Sabbath observance is highlighted in the Ten Commandments, a memorial to God's creation of the world: "because for six days, the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and on the seventh day, God rested; therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it" (Ex. 20:11). Our rest imitates and serves as witness to God's rest. But there is another narration of the Ten Commandments, later in Deuteronomy, that gives another motivation and justification for the Sabbath: "remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord, your God brought you forth from there with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day" (Deut. 5:15). Without going through a lengthy analysis of the connection between the Sabbath and the redemption of slaves through the exodus, there is a profound message that relates to our discussion of trafficking. We earn and deserve the Sabbath rest only when, like God, we work to free those who are enslaved, victimized and oppressed. Otherwise, we have no moral or religious right to withdraw from the world, to take a break or take it easy. We have to keep working until suffering and emancipation comes to all those whose freedoms are curtailed and whose safety and welfare is compromised.

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