

2008 Global Slavery and Human Trafficking

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The Biblical Foundation

God's passion for justice is clear throughout Scripture: God loves justice and hates injustice (Isaiah 61:8; Psalm 11:7); God has compassion on all who suffer injustice (Exodus 3:7-8, 22:26-27; Hosea 14:3; 2 Corinthians 1:3); God judges those who perpetrate injustice and holds them accountable (Psalm 10:15, 11:56; Malachi 3:5; Amos 2:67); and God intervenes to seek rescue for the victims of injustice (Psalm 72:12-14; Jeremiah 20:13; Gary A. Haugen, *Good News about Injustice*). These truths only outline God's heart for justice.

Actively seeking justice on behalf of the weak and victims of oppression is one of God's highest priorities and commands. The Hebrew prophets tell us that God requires us "to do justice" (Micah 6:8) and to "seek justice, rescue the oppressed" (Isaiah 1:17). Jesus calls "justice" one of "the more important matters of the law" (Matthew 23:23) and says that "proclaiming freedom for prisoners and releasing the oppressed" is central to God's mission (Luke 4:18-19). God calls all of us as co-laborers to accomplish God's bold purposes on earth. Therefore, as we face the reality of global slavery and human trafficking, we should not ask, "Where is God?" (Malachi 2:17), but rather, "Where are God's people—where are we?" (Isaiah 59:15-16; Ezekiel 22:25-30). And instead of despairing, we should find hope in the God of justice who has overcome the world (John 16:33).

The Present Reality

More people are held in slavery today than at any other time in history. In fact, globally almost 27 million men, women, and children are literally enslaved and daily exploited in the commercial sex industry, domestic servitude, armed conflict, agricultural labor, garment and household goods industry, and forced labor in mines, rock quarries, brick factories, and rice mills. One form of slavery is bonded labor, where young children and

whole families are forced to work to pay off a debt they can never pay off because of exorbitant interest rates. Another kind of slavery is human trafficking, where people are coerced or forced to provide labor or services often after being trafficked to unfamiliar locations. According to the U.S. State Department, 600,000 to 800,000 people are trafficked across national borders worldwide every year. More than half of these people are children, almost 80 percent are female, and the majority are trafficked for sexual exploitation, including forced prostitution and child pornography. Children overseas are kidnapped, sold, or coerced; economically desperate women respond to seemingly legitimate advertisements for modeling, domestic, hotel, or restaurant work—only to discover the employment agency is really a trafficking syndicate, and only to be drugged and beaten into submission. Modern-day slaveholders and traffickers physically confine and hide people against their will, beat or kill victims for trying to escape, and threaten to kill victims' family members if they tell anyone of their plight.

Even in the United States, in our own communities, slavery and trafficking abound: forced slave labor exists in at least ninety U.S. cities; human trafficking cases have opened in almost every U.S. state; almost 18,000 people are trafficked every year into the U.S. from Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America; and the U.S. is one of the largest importers of sex slaves. Preying on the weakest and most vulnerable members of society, traffickers in the U.S. enslave and exploit people in the commercial sex industry, domestic servitude, and farm labor, among other forms of forced labor. Pimps exploit the fear and vulnerability of runaway or neglected youth. Some labor contractors and employers of immigrant and/or migrant workers exploit the economic desperation and/or geographical unfamiliarity of domestic workers and farm laborers. Movies like the Lifetime miniseries, *Human Trafficking*, and the major motion picture, *Trade*, graphically and realistically portray the all-too-real horrors of the \$12 billion a year global industry of rape for profit.

Beyond the U.S., human trafficking flourishes in countries where the Evangelical Covenant Church is present and active through indigenous congregations, especially in Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, South Africa,

Sudan, India, and Thailand. Today, throughout our world, modern-day slavery perpetuates the devaluing of human beings, especially women and children, by turning people into products to be sold and used, and resold and abused. But, there is hope.

A New Reality

God calls and empowers us to join in creating a new reality here on earth for the hurting and the oppressed. When we as God's servants meaningfully respond to the needs of modern-day slaves and human trafficking victims, we manifest Christ's love for them in the most tangible ways possible (1 John 3:18). Jesus' sacrificial love compels us to respond to global slavery by drawing near to victims through thought and prayer and by bringing them Christ's freedom, justice, and healing. Practically speaking, we can do this through the following actions: 1) intervening and facilitating their rescue, 2) seeking justice by holding their perpetrators accountable in courts of law, 3) providing redemptive and holistic aftercare, and 4) preventing slavery through effective law enforcement and systemic change (Psalm 82:34; Proverbs 29:7; Isaiah 58:67; Jeremiah 21:12, 22:15-16).

Today, Christian organizations and churches around the world are beginning to respond to global slavery in all these ways. As Evangelical Covenant Church congregations and members, and as members of the worldwide body of Christ, we are empowered by God's grace to end modern-day slavery and manifest Christ's response of compassion and justice to its victims. The words of the contemporary abolitionist Gary Haugen, founder of International Justice Mission, challenge us to action: "When our grandchildren ask us where we were when the weak and the voiceless and the vulnerable of our era needed a leader of compassion and purpose and hope—I hope we can say that we showed up, and that we showed up on time." May we, may you, "show up" for today's weak and voiceless and vulnerable—today's modern-day slaves.

Our Response

Therefore, be it RESOLVED that the Evangelical Covenant Church denomination calls on:

- 1) Covenant congregations and members to pray for the abolition of global slavery and human trafficking and for the equality of all humanity;
- 2) Covenant congregations and members to partner with and support Women Ministries of the ECC; the Department of Compassion, Mercy, and Justice; the Department of World Mission; and Covenant World Relief in their collaborative efforts to biblically respond to modern-day slavery;
- 3) Covenant congregations and members to raise awareness about global slavery and raise money to support local, national, and international organizations that rescue slaves, provide holistic victim aftercare, hold perpetrators accountable by helping governments enforce anti-slavery laws, and/or work on prevention and advocacy measures;
- 4) Covenant congregations and members to explore local opportunities to serve victims of slavery and trafficking, either separately or in partnership with government agencies and non-governmental organizations, by providing social services, counseling, shelter, job training, and legal and language services;
- 5) Covenant pastors and lay leaders to educate our congregations, especially our youth, through justice-based curriculum about the reality of modern-day slavery and the available avenues for response and action, and to challenge Christians to answer God's call to seek justice and rescue the oppressed in real and tangible ways;
- 6) Covenant members to communicate to their elected officials in Congress that the effective enforcement of both the domestic and international provisions of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act are of paramount importance to you as Christian constituents, and to challenge their respective state legislature to vigorously enforce, or enact, anti-human trafficking legislation; and

7) Covenant congregations and members to use the Covenant's [human trafficking area of the website](#) in order to prayerfully discern ways to engage this injustice and to participate in the collaborative work of the denomination towards addressing modern-day slavery.