

Combating Modern-Day Slavery

While we often think of slavery as a barbaric practice from long ago, it is important to recognize that not only does it exist today, but it is thriving around the world. While slavery is outlawed worldwide, conservative estimates put the number of slaves today at about 27 million people. Organize a campaign to tell students, community members, and legislators that the world must demand an end to this atrocious practice!

Partnering Organizations and Contacts:

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Background Information:

The vast majority of the world's slaves are in South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal), followed by Africa (Mauritania and Sudan) and South America (Brazil). However, modern-day slavery exists almost everywhere. Many people do not realize that modern-day slavery occurs in the United States—some 10,000 people live and work in the U.S. as slaves.

Though every experience of slavery is unique, there are several common types of slavery in existence today. Many are familiar with *chattel slavery*, where slaves are considered the property of an “owner.” Chattel slavery was practiced in the American South prior to the Civil War, and is currently practiced in Mauritania and other parts of Northern Africa. *Debt bondage* (or bonded labor) is the most common method of slavery today, accounting for about 20 million of the world's slaves. After a person takes out a loan, usually to pay for basic necessities, the person must work for the moneylender to pay off the debt. Moneylenders use deceptive practices to prevent the debt from ever being repaid, and it may pass to future generations. Many Sri Lankan women are victims of debt bondage in Lebanon today. A relatively recent form of enslavement is *contract slavery*, most common in Thailand, where a worker enters into a false employment contract to earn wages; the slaveholder then refuses to pay the person but uses the false contract to hide and defend their activities. *Sexual slavery*, most common in Southeast Asia, occurs when persons, usually women and girls, are sold into the sex industry and often transported internally and across borders. Slaveholders lure vulnerable individuals by promising them or their parents that they will be given jobs selling food or cleaning.

There are a number of factors that have contributed to the resurgence of slavery today. Since the 1970s, the world's population has almost doubled in size, with the highest levels of population growth concentrated in developing nations. When there are fewer jobs, resources, and opportunities to go around, more people must take desperate measures to survive in these conditions. The worldwide socio-economic shift from rural life to urban centers has also prompted a rise in slavery as the prospect of better-paying jobs lures many to the cities. These people become part of a cheap and disposable labor supply, highly vulnerable to enslavement. Finally, corrupt governments leave slavery unchecked, and slaveholders continue to skirt the law and hold people in bondage. As a result of these factors, there are more slaves in the world today than at any time in history.

Women and children make up the majority of the world's slaves. In many countries, women are at particular risk due to their oppressed and marginalized position in society. Vulnerable to sexual harassment and violence, they are certainly vulnerable to the same treatment—and worse—as slaves. Women are enslaved to work as domestic servants, farm workers, and forced prostitutes in countries around the world. Because women are also often responsible for raising their children, if a woman becomes enslaved, her children could likely follow her into bondage.

Take Action to Combat Modern Day Slavery!

Get More Information from Free the Slaves

Free the Slaves' mission is to end slavery world-wide (www.freetheslaves.net). The organization works with grassroots anti-slavery organizations by funding their work and enabling local movements around the world to learn from each other. Another important facet of their work is the research of modern day slavery to formulate targeted ways to combat it. The group increases the awareness of contemporary slavery in the general public, as well as educating policy makers in order to formulate and enforce anti-slavery legislation. Free the Slaves also promotes slave-free trade, working with other NGOs and concerned businesses to eradicate slavery from product supply chains, and to build a consumer movement that chooses slave free goods.

- **Free the Slaves' monthly newsletter** will keep you and others informed of the latest information on modern day slavery and actions you can take, as well as volunteer information.
- **Sign the Free the Slaves' Anti-Slavery Petition** at <http://freetheslaves.net/action/> and print a hard copy to circulate while you table or hold events. Let the CEOs of Fortune 500 know that we don't want slavery in the products we buy; slavery is too high a price for cheap goods! Through coordination and cooperation between consumers and producers, we can eliminate slave labor from the product supply chain and ensure that we are not supporting those who profit by exploiting vulnerable people. There is also an education pack available to download from the website, featuring fact sheets and other resources at <http://freetheslaves.net/resources/k12/>.

Educate Your Legislators about Modern Day Slavery

Bring slavery to the attention of your legislators by encouraging your group and members of the campus community to call the offices of their representatives. You can locate your representatives' contact information at www.feminist.org/action. Free The Slaves provides some suggestions to get you started, as well as some key talking points to use at <http://freetheslaves.net/resources/guides/>. These talking points can also be included in letters to the editor to your campus or local paper, or to write an op-ed or news article.

Host a screening of the film "Dreams Die Hard"

A 35-minute documentary about modern-day trafficking and slavery in the U.S., "**Dreams Die Hard**" tells the stories of survivors of slavery, as well as those who have supported them in their journey toward legal, economic, and emotional restoration. You can receive the film free of charge by contacting Jacob Patton at patton@freetheslaves.net.