



ENDING SLAVERY!

*Understanding Human Trafficking - and What You Can Do About It
From the Rabbinical Assembly Task Force on Human Trafficking*

Facts, Figures, and a Plan for Ending Slavery by 2030

The Problem

What is human trafficking? Human trafficking is another term for slavery. Although illegal throughout the world, human trafficking is practiced in every country, including the United States and Israel. Force, coercion, threats of violence, and fraud are the most frequent tools used by traffickers to subjugate people. Slaves work against their will, without pay, and under abusive, unsafe conditions.

Who are the victims? Traffickers target vulnerable people, including those with inadequate access to food, credit, health care, education, and police protection. One in four people trafficked is a child. Along with children, adults who are displaced or migrating, living in extreme poverty and/or in remote villages, or subject to mistreatment based on their identity (caste, race, gender, religion or nationality) are especially vulnerable to enslavement. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by forced labor, accounting for over 95% of victims in the commercial sex industry and 58% in other sectors.

How many people are trafficked? Because trafficking is a crime that perpetrators try to hide and victims find difficult to report, numbers must be estimated. A conservative estimate by the International Labour Organization (ILO) is 24.9 million people. This number rises to approximately 40 million when also including the estimated 15 million people who are trapped in forced marriage, including child marriage.

Human trafficking is poorly tracked by most governments, including the United States. In 2017, the U.S. anti-trafficking organization Polaris fielded calls or texts from 8,759 cases involving 10,615 individual victims, nearly 5,000 potential traffickers and 1,698 trafficking businesses. Polaris' report concluded: "Shocking as these numbers are, they are likely only a tiny fraction of the actual problem."

What kind of work are people forced to do? Over half and closer to two thirds of all people in slavery today are exploited in private sector labor such as domestic and factory work, construction, agriculture, fishing, and the hospitality industry. Experts estimate that forced labor imposed by state authorities accounts for 10-15% of people enslaved today. Between 12 and 35% of victims are held in sex slavery, with the spread depending, in part, on whether forced marriage is counted in the category of sex slavery.

Solutions

What can be done, and why is now an auspicious time to act? There is hope. The knowledge of what leads to slavery has become the blueprint for eradicating it. When properly funded, anti-trafficking organizations can eliminate vulnerabilities (such as offering legitimate credit in lieu of debt bondage, educating workers about their rights, and providing treatment and job opportunities for former slaves) so that people can defend themselves against trafficking or re-trafficking. Flight attendants, police officers, and judges, among others, are being trained to recognize the signs of exploitation and not to mistake sex trafficking for prostitution. Former slaves have proven to be powerful advocates and educators.

Most important, *increased public awareness has pushed the global movement to end slavery to a tipping point.* The United Nations, through Sustainable Development Goals affirmed by all member nations, has committed to end human trafficking by 2030. The Catholic Church has set the same deadline. The Conservative/Masorti movement has partnered with other Jewish organizations, notably for the 2017 Jewish Statement of Values on Trafficking spearheaded by National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) and T'ruah.

More recently, in a [Jerusalem Post Op-Ed](#), the Rabbinical Assembly affirmed its focus on the 2030 deadline and invited all the arms of the Conservative movement and the wider Jewish community to work together toward this end.

The goal, as expressed in the Op-Ed, is potent: "The Conservative/Masorti movement and other Jewish institutions will raise consciousness around this issue such that *no Jew will sit down to their Seder without being mindful of, praying and acting to end slavery.*"

Why is this a job for the Jewish community?

In overwhelming numbers, Jews celebrate Passover, tell the story of the Exodus as a personal and national narrative, and cherish the values of redeeming captives, protecting the vulnerable, and loving the stranger. Jews of every stripe want to feel that our tradition is relevant, meaningful, and an influence for good in the world. It is time for the Jewish community, which gave the world the Book of Exodus and the notion of God as Liberator and Redeemer, to take a leadership role in ending slavery. The Conservative Movement is committed to being in the vanguard of that leadership.

What can you do?

- **SHOP WITH CARE.** If you shop for your family, synagogue, school, or place of work, add a mitzvah to your cart!
 - Whenever possible, buy Fair Trade goods, which assure some protections for workers. Slavery is rampant in many industries. If you are not buying fair trade chocolate, for example, then you are probably buying chocolate made from beans picked by slaves. Step out in leadership and organize a Fair Trade Coffee and Chocolate Tasting at a local school, synagogue, or JCC.
 - When food, clothing, rugs, or other goods are very cheap, ask: who helped make them and under what conditions? Since 2012, California has required most large companies to post anti-slavery policies on their websites. KnowTheChain.org has a database of over 5,000 companies' statements. Support businesses with clear guidelines backed by third-party, ongoing, on-the-ground monitoring.
- **RAISE FUNDS.** Donate to organizations that are working to promote freedom and/or support trafficking survivors. Organize a fundraiser at a school or synagogue. Many organizations, including Free The Slaves, will assist you in hosting a parlor meeting or running a fundraiser.
- **INVOLVE YOUTH** in your community using the newly-released RA publication *No More Slaves!: A Resource Guide for Engaging and Empowering Young Jews (from tweens to college students) To Help End Human Trafficking by 2030*. Download the guide here: <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/story/ending-slavery-resources-human-trafficking>
- **ENHANCE YOUR SHABBAT.** Bring awareness of slavery and freedom to Shabbat, which is described in the Friday night Kiddush as "a memorial to the Exodus from Egypt."
 - Mine the weekly Torah portion for instructions or narratives about slavery, freedom, compassion, equality, and justice. (*No More Slaves!* has done much of that work for you in Index A.) Write a blog or raise topics for discussion during Shabbat.
 - Serve *maror* (horseradish) on Shabbat to remember slavery all year long!
 - Set out a plate and an empty chair for a slave who is not free to rest, eat well, or celebrate.
- **ASK LEADERS.** Whether you are on an Earnings' Call with a CEO, or at a Town Hall with a mayoral or Presidential candidate, ask leaders what they have done and intend to do about human trafficking. Ask the people who represent you in D.C, for their policy statements.
- **LEARN MORE.** Bring speakers to your community to learn more and to ignite enthusiasm and resolve. Jewish organizations that focus on trafficking, including the Passover Project of Free the Slaves, The Rabbinical Assembly, and T'ruah, can help. Join the email lists of anti-trafficking organizations such as Free the Slaves, Polaris, and The Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (CAST) to stay up-to-date about legislation, advocacy, and strategic initiatives. Read the newly updated RA materials on human trafficking at <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/tzedek/slavery-and-human-trafficking> for timely and timeless articles, lesson plans, programming ideas, and Passover Seder resources from and for the Jewish community.