

## Child Slavery in all its forms

Child Slavery is often confused with “child labour” or “child exploitation”. It is a fact of life that there are millions of children all over the world who are working in places like food stalls, hotels and restaurants, or as domestic servants because they may be the only bread winners in their family. But for these unfortunates at least they have a choice, albeit a very difficult one, to work or not to work, to leave or not to leave. A child who is a slave has no choice. A slave can be defined as someone who is “*unpaid, unable to leave and is controlled by violence or the threat of violence*”. For these children, their free will is taken away. Their labour, their lives and their minds are consumed by someone else’s greed. In short, if a child is able to walk away, however hard that choice, that child is not a slave.

The ILO estimates that currently there are 8.4 million children engaged in what it calls “*the worst forms of labour*”. The main forms of slavery are listed below.

**Chattel Slavery** is closest to the old form of slavery which we associate with the Atlantic Slave Trade. A person is captured, born, or sold into slavery, and the ownership is often asserted. The slave’s children are normally treated as property as well. Most often found in North and West Africa and some Arab countries, chattel slaves are now relatively few in number. The most prominent area where this type of slavery is still prevalent is Mauritania. Although slavery was legally abolished in the country in 1980, 600,000 of the population live as slaves and approximately half of these slaves are children. Slavery in Mauritania is unique not only for its centuries-old continuation, but also for its deep rooted acceptance in the minds of the slaves. Child slavery is fundamentally ingrained into a hierarchical social structure whereby slaves are born, raised and die all the while accepting their inherited status. Little violence is necessary to maintain Mauritanian slaves’ subordination as few question their position or even contemplate escape.

**Debt Bondage** is the most common form of slavery in South Asia, particularly in Nepal, Pakistan and India where it took root in the caste system. A person pledges himself/herself against a loan, but the length and nature of their work is not defined, nor does the work reduce the debt. The bondage begins when a crisis occurs, like a serious illness or a crop failure. Poor families do not have the resources to buy medicine or enough food. Offered a loan, the debt inevitably increases because of exorbitant loan or fictitious charges and the recipient of the loan is trapped into an ever increasing spiral of debt which can be passed down, enslaving offspring. Ownership is not normally asserted, but there is complete control over the slave.

In India the system was criminalized by the Bonded Labour Abolition Act of 1976, yet it is estimated that there are 10 million bonded labourers in India. Children form a large part of this bonded workforce. In his book “Disposable People”, Kevin Bales highlights the plight of the children who produce fireworks and matches around the city of Sivakasi in the State of Tamil Nadu. According to Bales “*some 45,000 children work in these factories, making this perhaps the largest concentration of child labourers in the world. Between 3 am and 5 am every morning, buses from the factories visit the villages in the surrounding countryside. Local agents have*

*enlisted the children, whose ages range from three and a half to fifteen, paying an advance to their parents and creating the debt bond.”*

**Contract slavery** is the second most common form of modern slavery. Workers are offered contracts that guarantee employment in a workshop, plantation, mine or factory, but when the workers are transported to their place of “employment” they find themselves enslaved. If legal questions are raised, the contract can be produced, but the reality is that the “contract worker” is a slave, threatened by violence, lacking any freedom of movement and paid nothing.

The promise of a contract of employment is one of the major weapons of the human trafficker. Around 800,000 men, women and children are trafficked each year across international borders into slavery, and human trafficking is now the third largest source of income for organised crime, after drug smuggling and arms smuggling. Of the 800,000 victims, around 80% are female and 50% are children. They enter a range of economic sectors, but predominantly the sex industry. Many of these unfortunates accept job offers and sign phoney contracts, beginning their journey into slavery. Told they owe money for their trip, they are forced to work off their debt with clients. Thereafter they are used and abused and repeatedly traded on the female used body market where they are passed from man to man like a shared cigarette....used and then, all too often, stubbed out.

Contract slavery is prevalent in Brazil, South East Asia, some Arab States and in West Africa particularly on the cocoa plantations which collectively supplies nearly 80% of the world’s cocoa. One of the largest producers of cocoa is the Ivory Coast, where it is reported that slave labour is used in 90% of the cocoa farms. The TV documentary by True Vision (**Slavery -A Global Investigation**), highlighted the procurement of young boys from neighbouring countries like Mali, Benin, Togo and Bukina Faso, who are offered what sounds like a good job on a cocoa plantation. However, when they reach the isolated cocoa farms, they are immediately enslaved. The widespread use of child labour in cocoa production is controversial not only because of the usual concerns about child labour and exploitation, but also because many of the children working in the Ivory coast cocoa industry may be the victims also of human trafficking. (Up to 12,000 of the 200,000 children working there, according to the International Labour Organisation).

**Forced Labour** is the fourth form of slavery. Whilst all slavery is a form of forced labour, this term specifically means slavery that is practiced not by a person but by a state or by agencies of a state, other than as a punishment for a criminal offence. Two prime examples of the use of children as forced labourers can be found in Uzbekistan and China.

Uzbekistan is the sixth largest producer of cotton in the world and the third biggest exporter, generating over US\$1 billion through the export of around 800,000 tonnes of cotton every year. Around 90% of Uzbex cotton is harvested by hand and state sponsored forced labour, particularly of children, underpins the country’s cotton industry. Human rights groups estimate that up to 200,000 children are forced to pick cotton each year. In order to achieve this labour, each September, many schools are closed down as children, some as young as ten, are sent to the fields to pick cotton by hand for up to three months.

In some provinces in China, children are forced to make fireworks, often under dangerous conditions. This situation was highlighted a few years ago when an explosion in Jiangxi Province killed 38 children in a primary school and badly burnt many more. According to contemporary reports, pupils as young as eight were told to manufacture firecrackers by hand to pay for their school fees.

Children are also forced to fight wars in many parts of the world. In spite of the fact that international law forbids the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts, it is estimated that around 300,000 children under the age of 15 are associated with armed groups around the world. Examples of countries where child soldiers are or have been used over the last ten years, are the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Liberia, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone.

**Slavery linked to religion** is common in certain parts of Africa and India. For example in Ghana, young girls are given by their families to local fetish priests as an atonement for alleged offences committed by their relatives or even ancestors. The *trokosis* as they are known will stay with the priests, cooking and cleaning, farming and serving them sexually until they free the girls, usually after they have each borne several children. At that point the girls' families must provide other girls as a replacement. The *trokosi* practice was banned in Ghana in 1998, but enforcement of the ban has been ineffective. Local organisations estimate that there are between 5,000 and 20,000 Ghanaian women currently held as *trokosis*. The practice also exists to a lesser extent in Togo, Benin and in south western Nigeria.

In southern India, Dalit girls are forced into prostitution by a religious custom known as *devadasi*. The custom requires parents to marry a daughter to a deity or a temple. The marriage usually occurs before the girl reaches puberty and requires the girl to become a prostitute for upper caste community members. Such girls are known as *joginis* and are forbidden to enter into a real marriage. The practice was officially outlawed in 1986 but continues unabated.

**An analysis of the global extent of child slavery** is provided by Kevin Bales. In his latest book "*Modern Slavery – The secret world of 27 million people*" he provides a breakdown of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) global figure of 8.4 million child slaves.

*"The figure of 8.4 million breaks down as follows: forced and bonded labor (5.7 million), prostitution and pornography (1.8 million), illicit activities (0.6 million), and armed conflict (0.3 million). Of these children, the majority caught in forced and bonded labour are in the Asia-Pacific region (5.5 million), and in discussing this forced labor, the ILO notes that it involves the presence of one or more of the following elements: a restriction of the freedom to move; a degree of control going beyond the normal exertion of lawful authority; physical or mental violence; and the absence of informed consent. Along gender lines. Boys tend to be enslaved in commercial farming, petty crimes and the drug trade, whilst girls are mainly enslaved in commercial sexual exploitation and domestic service"*

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