



Portfolio sample by Stacy Dry Lara

## Contemporary Slavery - A Borderless Human Rights Violation September 10, 2014

This week at HRC27 was a riveting report by Special Rapporteur (SR) on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, Urmila Bhoola. Wherever you are, if you just look around, you will see this breach of human rights in one form or another. Today, let's examine the violation a little deeper. I find the figures staggering.

Slavery from its earliest days is a violation of numerous human rights and today, under international human rights laws, is illegal yet various forms of contemporary slavery persist, generating profits in the billions of dollars. According to the United Nations (UN) contemporary forms of slavery include but are not limited to issues such as debt bondage, serfdom, forced labor, child slavery, sexual slavery, forced or early marriages and the sale of wives and affects people globally of all age, gender and race.

The UN mandate for a SR on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, was established by the Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2007 and has been renewed twice. In May 2014, the HRC appointed as SR Bhoola. Under her mandate, the SR will assess issues relating to legislation, awareness-raising, discrimination and rehabilitation, and generate an overview of various multi-stakeholder initiatives to combat contemporary forms of slavery. Of great significance to FAWCO and other non-government organizations (NGOs), is the importance Ms. Bhoola places on their engagement and assistance as she conducts her work on slavery and slavery-like practices.

The SR has identified four key thematic areas of focus:

1. Elimination of domestic servitude. The practice of domestic servitude and domestic slavery are outlawed by international human rights laws yet the practice continues across developed and developing countries. The SR is concerned that, "the victim is economically exploited, totally dependent on other individuals and cannot end the relationship at his or her own volition." She said that of particular concern is the high prevalence of children in domestic servitude.
2. Child and forced marriage. She explained that "under the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, all forms of forced marriage are defined as practices similar to slavery." She said it is regrettable that there are still countries that do not criminalize child and forced marriage and slavery practices.
3. Elimination of the worst forms of child labor. According to the ILO, of the 15.5 million children in paid or unpaid domestic work in the home of a third-party employer, 10.5 million are estimated to be under the legal working age or are working in hazardous conditions or conditions tantamount to slavery. Ms. Bhoola expressed grave concern about the worst forms of child labor such as agriculture, tobacco tilling, cotton picking, entertainment, construction, mining and quarrying.
4. Prioritize the role of business, in particular transnational corporations, in ensuring the eradication of forced labor and other contemporary forms of slavery from global supply chains. Recent ILO research indicates that about US \$150 billion in profits are made through the use of forced labor in the private economy worldwide. In terms of forced labor, those exploited

including domestic work, agriculture and other economic activities, such as construction, manufacturing, mining or utilities, generate an estimated US\$ 51 billion in profits per year.

As you can realize, the battle against contemporary forms of slavery is met with many obstacles. The SR acknowledged that further progress toward eradicating the issue can only be achieved by addressing the root causes including poverty, regional disparities and the lack of access to livelihoods, education and health care. In previous reports she also expresses concern about the challenges of data collection because of the social and economic invisibility of those in slavery. She suggests that good practices in combatting contemporary slavery can be promoted by civil society organizations including NGOs and governments.

The proposed post-2015 sustainable development goals provide a comprehensive framework for addressing modern slavery issues and set targets and indicators for both developed and developing countries to eliminate labor exploitation and manifestations of contemporary forms of slavery once and for all.

Slavery leaves traces. It can persist as a state of mind- among victims, their descendants and among the inheritors of those who practiced it. Until abolished, there is a spark of help for victims...In 1991 the UN established the Slavery Fund to assist individuals whose human rights have been severely violated as a result of modern slavery. The Fund is managed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, with the advice of a Board of Trustees composed of independent experts from the five world regions. It provides direct humanitarian, legal and financial assistance to victims through grants awarded to non-governmental organizations. Since its inception, the Slavery Fund has awarded more than 400 organizations in 95 countries funds to assist to thousands of victims.

In consideration of the millions of those enslaved today, take this into consideration - The ILO indicates that 90 percent of the estimated 20.9 million people in forced labor globally are exploited by individuals or enterprises in the private economy. Doesn't this reinforce the need to ensure that business practices are congruent with human rights?

At the discussion, Kazakhstan, Mauritania and Ghana spoke as concerned countries. Numerous countries spoke as interactive debate. Attached are their statements if you are interested in reading. (Statements combine contemporary forms of slavery and rights of older persons.)

*Thanks for reading – until the next blog Stacy Lara.*

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