

## **CRC Conference 2007: The Modern Forms of Slavery**

By Fr Shay Cullen Msc.

I thank you for being here today to listen to my account of the situation of modern-slavery as I have seen and encountered it in the past 36 years as a missionary in South East Asia. This is not a pleasant subject, it is heart wrenching, troubling, and above all a challenging issue for us who are free and better off than almost two thirds of human on the planet today. These are the people who are crying out for freedom from the chains of modern slavery today - the children, women and men enslaved by poverty and the greed of their exploiters in the most dehumanising kind of work.

They are crushed too by a global system of injustice and abuse.

The fact that we are here today recalling the commitment and dedication of William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson to successfully have laws passed to abolish slavery is evidence that their Christian Faith and unshakeable belief in the dignity of the human person, is still alive and well today.

Your presence is also a tribute to the people of Hull and Yorkshire who had the wisdom and trust in William to elect him to parliament when only 21 years old and re-elect him in 1784. It's a signal that we today, need to trust, encourage, and inspire young people in their idealism. We need to be prophetic outspoken and active in defending and promoting human rights and the dignity of the human person. It teaches us that political action motivated by gospel values can have a global impact and benefit the lives of millions. This is what William Wilberforce achieved with the help of his supporters and friends. It only takes one to say no to injustice for many to say yes to freedom. It is this no doubt that brings all of us here together today.

What inspired and motivated people like William Wilberforce and what sustains those working for justice and truth and decency is a love that is unselfish, compassionate, challenging and liberating. This is what can help free all those captives of the modern forms of slavery .

We live in a materialistic world driven by consumerism, a passion for profit where human value is measured by how much money one has and the poor are excluded and rejected as worthless, unless they can be exploited and enslaved.

In one sense slavery today is the same as it always was; it is the dominance of the powerful over the weak , the rich over the poor, human beings are still being reduced to a commodity, deprived of freedom, working for nothing, exploited for profit, owned like an animal, forced to grovel. And worst of all it is the slavery of children in the organised sex industry. That form of slavery is now a billion dollar business . What is most repulsive of all is that it is tolerated and toasted, encouraged and approved by local governments in parts of the developing world who have vested interests.

Responsible too are the Internet server companies that refuse to filter and block access to child pornography web site when they could easily do so. British Telecom has shown the way. Government could legislate to make it mandatory for access to child pornography to be blocked to protect children and minors accessing it and save those children being enslaved and abused in order to make the pornography.

In the worst forms of sexual exploitation child sex slaves are chained to beds, abused daily, threatened and tortured, punched and punished, beaten and bruised, and made a plaything for the powerful, a toy for the depraved. This kind of sex slavery is organised, financed by local and foreign investors, many of them have criminal backgrounds in their own countries and are protected by politicians, prosecutors and judges. Some of these officials are implicated and compromised by illicit relationships with minors and open to blackmail by the child and women traffickers and exploiters. They can prosper with impunity.

The criminals who escape from Britain or other Western countries and travel abroad as sex tourists or sex investors in brothels and bars in developing countries are the traffickers and slavers today. They establish and set up the system of exploitation. They are not sufficiently pursued abroad by European law enforcement officers nor is there political will to investigate the criminals and bring them to justice in their country of origin. "Better let them abuse there than here" this deplorable attitude would seem to say and where it exists we have to change it.

One child, the case of 15 year old Angelita, is not unusual. She was hired by a recruiter in Negros island. Her parents were given an advance payment from her promised future wages. She was brought from Negros Island to Manila as a domestic worker to be a house maid for a wealthy businessman but was raped by his son, Angelita ran away, was offered food and shelter by a pimp on the prowl and then sold in to the Sweet 16 sex club in Subic Town, near Olongapo City.

There she was made undress wear a bikini and was trained as a bar dancer and made believe that this was her salvation and future. Angelita was told she was now a member of the sex bar family. She was made to believe that she was taken care of by her Mamasan, a former prostituted woman and that she was protected by Big Daddy, the foreign brothel investor and operator. The other girl dancers were to be treated as her sisters and she was to be loyal to the family and earn money for it.

This is an insidious abuse of the traditional family closeness and interdependency that is part of Filipino culture. Soon Angelita was sexually abused by the brothel's operator and she was then prostituted and sold to sailors and sex tourists who paid the brothel's operator. Angelita was continually in debt and only earned a pittance. Most of her earnings was deducted to pay her board and lodging, laundry and other needs. Angelita was warned not to leave until all her the debts were paid or she would be arrested and jailed.

Thousands of underage girls, some as young as 13 are exploited and enslaved in this way every year in the Philippines and hundreds of thousands in South East Asia. In India it is as high as 1.2 million.

After Angelita was rescued she resented it and was angry and refused to co-operate and attempted to escape from the Preda children's home and go back to the brothel. It took months to help her realise how she was being

exploited and had rights and dignity and a better future.

The cry and emotional expression therapy in the Preda children's home helps the healing and recovery. Education, affirmation and support restores self-esteem and empowers the children. Today Angelita has fully recovered and has embraced a Christian way of life and is an outspoken advocate of children's rights.

Nowadays our Faith in the intrinsic value and goodness of every human being must flow into action and action will strengthen that faith. Unless we do the forces of evil that masquerade as good will be condoned and accepted. The corrupting industries of modern slavery already present themselves as beneficial investors in the economy, harmless entertainment, benign, legitimate fun and entertainment. In many countries in South East Asia local governments give licenses and permits to these establishments where women and abused and children exploited and put up for sale. This is why sex-slavery is expanding unchecked and so too the erosion of moral religious values.

for it to success and be accept the impoverished youth need to be presented as degenerate, drug dependants, useless and promiscuous. Their enslavement in prostitution is made all the more acceptable.

The erosion of moral values set the scene for the sexual abuse and enslavement of children by adults and even parents or live-in partners. We have successfully rescued many children who had been sexually abused and exploited in their own homes by live-partners or by their own parent.

13 year old Anna Marie is another child among dozens that we are privileged to have rescued and protected. A teacher told us about Anna Marie, one of her students after one of our Preda daily seminars on the rights of the child held in schools throughout the province.

We investigated, rescued the child and confirmed she was made a sex-slave by her own father. He threatened to kill her and burn her brothers and sisters alive if she did not please his every desire. After she was rescued and brought to the Preda home for children, political authorities, came to the help the well connected accused not the victim. Through a Habeas Corpus case the abuser was able to get the judge to return the child to the custody of the mother and her live in partner -the abuser. this put the child into even greater danger However we insisted that the child be brought to her aunt in a distant province for her protection.

Slavery thrives because of incompetent courts, corrupted prosecutors and abusive police and a public that doesn't know or doesn't want to know the extent of sex-slavery corruption and child abuse. I have seen many pedophiles and slave masters walk free from courtrooms and prisons. In the Philippines no more than a few traffickers have been convicted under the new law in the past three years. In surveillance work social workers and children's rights workers have been openly offered minors for sex for as little as twenty pounds. The sex traders are well protected and have no fear of the law or enforcers.

This is coming from on a long tradition sex business introduced by the US Navy when it had huge naval and airforce bases in the philippines. sex trade thrived, hundreds of clubs bars brothels and sex dens operated with impunity. The locals were encouraged to put aside their

moral shock and religious morality and join the money making fun. thousands of young girls were hired as prostitutes. In 1988 the US Navy itself did an undercover operation and recorded in official reports that children as young as 6 years old were being offered for abuse.

With my social workers i uncovered school traffickers selling children to the sailors and exposed it in the media and began a campaign to close down the bases. Impossible as it appeared then the campaign offered a conversion plan and the development of a free Port, high tech manufacturing area and a family and eco-tourism destination as a replacement for sex tourism. We lobbied for the legislation and the vote in the senate to abolish the bases and the yes vote won and those bases were finally closed after almost a hundred years of military occupation. It was a great day of freedom for the Filipino people. Today the huge facilities are full of computer factories and other industries and employ 80,000 Filipinos. However the sex industry is still a legacy of that period.

Prison slavery of Children.

There is another kind of slavery the kind behind high wall and prison bars.the unseen and unreported. children in prison are made the slave house boys of the criminals and guards.

There was Jamie, a diminutive little boy ,12 years old, who was jailed with the rapists and murderers of Metro Manila. He was frail skinny and very frightened when I found him shivering in a dark corner of a overcrowded cell crammed with half naked sweating criminals. He was but one of an estimated 20,000 children that are put behind bars in the course of one year in the Philippines despite a new law to end the jailing of children. It took nine year of lobbying , campaigning and international media exposure to get that law passed by the Philippine congress. Like that of Wilberforce it was a hard struggle against politicians who saw nothing wrong with either slavery or the imprisonment of children in harsh abusive conditions.

Jamie's "crime" was playing cards on a street corner after school. The police said it was gambling, the family said it was child's play. He was put in detention and forgotten. The prosecutor never saw him and the judge never heard him. His family couldn't afford the bribe the police wanted to have him released.

The family brought him food just once a week. They had to pay the warden to get in. Jamie being the smallest got the least food. He was forced to work for it. The daily handful of jail rice and dried fish left him weak and hungry. TB was a constant danger, scabies spread and gave him sores and an agonizing itch, AIDS was ever present .

He was dragged into the toilet at night and repeatedly raped, and crying with the pain, he was beaten to shut up, then starved to let them do it again. Like thousands of others he was enslaved, abused exploited. He washed their clothes so they wouldn't beat him. He massaged their backs so they would feed him, he cleaned the excrement filled toilets so he could sleep. The guards also used him and many other children as unpaid workers. Most are not convicted or sentenced but held on remand,none can afford to pay bail. Jamie was the prison slave and

there are many more like him. He was tattooed , marked for life as a criminal , with the symbol of the jail gang that "owned" him.

He was a non person until we found him, made a appeal to the prison authorities have him released. It succeeded It took months for him to recover , but eventually he did and is now back at school.

There are thousands of children suffering similar slavery behind bars. Ten years ago the campaign to change the law to free the children and give them immunity for prosecution if 15 years and younger and a chance at recovery and redemption in a rehabilitation home if they were older and had committed an offense. There was no interest among politicians and the law languished and was put aside many times. Meanwhile thousands of children were being imprisoned with adult criminals and paedophiles.

After endless years of lobbying and campaigning with the Juvenile justice network without success with the help of the Jubilee campaign led by Danny Smith I was able to get a ITV camera crew inside several of the prisons to film the horrific conditions .this was shown later on CNN and it shocked the Philippines within weeks the senate had passed the law. Six months later we again arranged for a return visit to see if change occurred but found worst conditions and ITV and CNN broadcast it again , soon after that February 2006 broadcast the Philippine congress passed the Juvenile justice bill that prevent children from being jailed. It was a great leap forward in ending the slavery of children behind bars. Today I am being sued for libel by one of the inmates for that ITV /CNN report.

The majority of these rescued children at Preda recovery center for "Children in conflict with the law" are transferred by the courts or authorities through legal proceedings.

At first the prosecutors and judges wanted the center to be totally secured against escape, with a wall and fences and guards. But we have none of those, we have an open center that is more of a family environment and not a detention center. There are no guards and gates walls and fences. The holding power that encourages the youth to transform themselves is trust, affirmation, friendship, restoring their self esteem, value formation teaching them about their dignity and rights as children of God. They receive education and livelihood training. Few ever leave the hildside home .

Slavery in the Sugar cane fields.

One day last December I was called to help stop another kind of slavery that is more similar to that of the old. Twenty impoverished hungry unemployed farm workers had been promised good wages and conditions and were transported to a far off province to cut the sugar cane. They were forced to live in a crowded unsanitary bunk house and forced to get food on credit from the store of the manager. They had increasing debts and received no wages. They were refused permission to leave and were trapped under the guns of the rich man's security guards. We at Preda helped organise a rescue and with the anti-trafficking police unit we made a dawn visit to the sugar plantation a two hour drive from Manila.

We found them including a woman and children and two teenagers . and men alike in slave like subhuman conditions on the land of a vastly rich political family. There were hundreds more in similar conditions in other parts of the plantation but without a complaining witnesses

we could not rescue them. The Television Station sent a camera crew with us but the report was not allowed to be broadcast and most of the suspects were allowed to go free.

## Child Workers

Slavery spreads, children by the thousands are forced to work from the ages of 5 to 15 years old. In the Philippines it is banned but still thousands have to do it to survive. A working child is found in every three homes. They work on farms and small plantations, they plant the sugar, they cut the corn, they harvest the rice, carry the water, gather the bananas, spread the chemicals, spray the pesticide and suffer disease, fatigue and a life of sorrow without end.

All this is unpaid labour. In the cities they gather the scrap, scratch the garbage dumps, beg on the streets, work in the brothels. There is no end to this slavery. In the Philippines 4 million of the 25 million children are working for little or no pay and are out of school.

There is much we can do to change the situation

\*By supporting the charities with antislavery campaigning charities,

\*By involving young people in campaigns to protect children here and abroad, educate them as to the realities of the developing world through training and exchange visits to children's youth projects.

\* . We can lobby and campaign to bring those responsible for wide spread killing and abuse of children to trial. The death squads of Davao that kill children are just another example where the politicians enjoy impunity and are above the law. The arrest and trial of Thomas Lubanga at International Criminal Court' in The Hague, for the recruitment of child soldiers is the first such case and we need many more.

\*In Britain we can write letters of support for the International investigations of the UK Police unit Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)

Action to save children from modern forms of slavery is a challenge to us all, to transform this unjust and terrible situation of the children of the world. Above all we must encourage children to help children. If we teach by example, lead by word and action, involve the young people in action for exploited children we can help them to See Judge and Act for others.

We need great self-sacrificing concern and compassion, to help our neighbours who have been set upon, beaten, robbed of their possessions and dignity and left by the side of the road of life to suffer and die. They have been bypassed by the politicians and the priests, the elite and the privileged, the proud and the powerful and left for us like the good Samaritan to rescue, protect and heal and challenge the attitudes and policies that allow such injustice and human suffering. To these enslaved people all of us are called to help no matter our or their race or religion, colour or creed.

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