

The Executive Council recommends this resolution be sent to a committee of the General Synod.

**A Call to Awareness and Action
to End the Practice of Trafficking in Persons**

Approved

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted By: Justice and Witness Ministries

Summary

The Governing Board of the National Council of Churches, USA, approved on September 22, 2008, a “Resolution on Human Trafficking” which calls upon the member communions of the NCC to educate their congregations and advocate for policies that will bring an end to human trafficking, also known as trafficking in persons. This resolution calls upon the United Church of Christ and its congregations to be part of this education and advocacy effort.

Background

Human trafficking, also known as “trafficking in persons,” is the use of force, coercion, fraud or abduction to exploit the person for profit. Victims of human trafficking are subjected to labor and/or sexual exploitation, which may take many forms including debt bondage, commercial sexual abuse of children, prostitution, pornography, bride trafficking, child soldiering, domestic servitude and forced labor. Human trafficking is currently the third largest criminal industry in the world today, after arms and drug dealing. It is also the fastest growing.

According to the U.S. Department of State, approximately 800,000 people are trafficked across national borders, not including the millions that are trafficked within their own countries. In the U.S. alone, between 14,500 and 17,500 are trafficked each year. The International Labor Organization also estimates that there are 12.3 million people in forced labor, bonded labor, forced child labor, and sexual servitude at any given time, although there are estimates ranging from four million to 27 million. Trafficking in persons is also referred to as “modern day slavery” since those whose labor and livelihoods are exploited are threatened with severe consequences, including death, should they flee the situation.

Women, children and people from poor nations are the most likely targets of human trafficking around the world. In fact, the State Department estimates that more than 80 percent of trafficking victims are women and girls and about 50 percent are under 18 years of age. Within the U.S., much of this activity is hidden from public scrutiny or ignored because of the nature of the businesses that utilize trafficked persons (massage parlors, strip clubs, etc.).

In our current economic crisis, it is likely that there will be an increase in the trafficking of persons as more nations and communities face economic stress.

Biblical and Theological Rationale

Trafficking in persons is a crime against humanity and ultimately a sin. Human trafficking denies the values of human life, exposes victims to serious health risks, endangers the mental well-being of victims and impedes the ability of victims to reach their full God-given potential. As Christians, we believe that every human being is created in the image and likeness of the divine Creator, of God. The prophets cried out against the exploitation of the poor and of laborers who are not treated fairly and compensated justly (Job 24:1-12, for example). The United Church of Christ has consistently upheld the rights and dignity of workers and of women and children, believing that God calls us into community with each other as sisters and brothers, not as exploiters and exploited. The violence done to the physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing of children and women who are forced into prostitution, the pornography industry, sex tourism and other forms of exploitation are violations of the call of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to love our neighbors as ourselves. The kin-dom of God among us requires us to provide protection for those most vulnerable and to seek conditions which support wholeness and health for everyone.

The Resolution

Whereas trafficking in persons is a global, widespread and illegal practice which violates basic human rights, including the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights, and is a sin against God,

Whereas an estimated 14-18,000 persons are trafficked within the United States, often in the communities where we live, work and worship, and

Whereas the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA has called upon its member communions to study and engage in advocacy on issues of human trafficking, and

Whereas women and children represent the largest percentage (80%) of those being trafficked, and

Whereas the United Church of Christ has longstanding commitments to ensuring the basic human rights of all persons,

Therefore, be it resolved that the Twenty-seventh General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages its members, congregations and various settings to engage in education about the issue of trafficking in persons and advocacy efforts to end this criminal and abusive practice.

Be it further resolved that Justice and Witness Ministries and Wider Church Ministries is requested to provide resourcing for education and advocacy, including use of the National Council of Churches in the USA's "Social Creed for the 21st Century"; **promotion of "The Rescue and Restore Campaign," an initiative of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Administration for Children and Families (ACF) which maintains a public awareness website to combat human trafficking and a**

~~referral hotline to connect victims with NGO's in their local area;~~ work with international ecumenical bodies and other agencies such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Freedom Network to bring an end to human trafficking in the United States and abroad; ~~monitoring~~ advocate for the ongoing funding for the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000; and

Be it finally resolved that local congregations are encouraged to observe the Sunday closest to January 11 as “Human Trafficking Awareness Day” through prayer, reflection, education and actions that will assist in bringing an end to these forms of modern day slavery.

Funding

Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the named agencies and the subject to availability of funds.

Implementation

Justice and Witness Ministries is requested to work with Wider Church Ministries to implement this resolution.