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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

ADJOURNMENT

Human Trafficking

SPEECH

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SPEECH

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Speaker Senator POLLEY

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Senator POLLEY (Tasmania—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (19:41): According to World Vision Australia, human trafficking is a significant global problem. In my opinion, this is simply not okay and, in fact, it is a crime against humanity. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, human trafficking is the act of:

...recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring or receiving a person through a use of force, coercion or other means for the purpose of exploiting them.

They go on to say that:

Every year, thousands of men, women and children fall into the hands of traffickers, in their own countries and abroad. Every country in the world is affected by trafficking, whether as a country of origin, transit or destination for victims.

Human trafficking involves an act of recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring or receiving a person through use of force, coercion or other means for the purpose of exploiting them. Human trafficking is one of the world's most profitable crimes after arms and drugs. Human trafficking is transnational and highly organised, which leads to difficulties in putting a stop to this outrageous abuse of human rights. Human trafficking most often happens to vulnerable individuals. They may be vulnerable because of poverty or, as in the case of many women and girls around the world, they may be in a position of subservience. The extent of the problem of human trafficking is enormous. It is estimated that trafficking enslaves well over 27 million people around the globe and creates a profit of \$32 billion for the traffickers.

There are many cases of human trafficking and the people it affects vary from children used for forced labour to women forced into prostitution. Australia is a destination country for victims of human trafficking. These victims come from many different countries, but particularly common in Australia are individuals from the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Korea and Thailand. As Christopher Craigie, Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions, stated:

It is now recognised that the Asia Pacific region is one 'hub' for human trafficking, particularly where that trafficking is for the purposes of sexual servitude. Plainly, as Australia is now a destination country and market for this type of offending, we carry a responsibility to address the problem vigorously.

The truly awful things about human trafficking is the deception and coercion that occurs. For example, I have read, as I am sure many in this chamber have, numbers of reports which detail individuals who may, at the first instance, have believed they were coming to a foreign country with a promise of employment and a good life, only to have arrived and been forced into unpaid labour, prostitution or slavery. Victims of human trafficking can be any age and any gender. However, a disproportionate number of women are involved in human trafficking, both as victims and as culprits. Females are more strongly represented in human trafficking due to that fact that often the only way out of a situation in which a woman has been a victim is to become a human trafficker and work for her captors.

Every single year, thousands of individuals—men, women and children—are forcibly removed from their homes and towns and taken elsewhere by human traffickers. Human trafficking is not just something that affects individuals; it has an incalculable negative effect on the families and their communities. The most commonly identified form of human trafficking is, disturbingly, for the purpose of sexual exploitation. This reason is behind 79 per cent of trafficking. This statistic also alerts us to the fact that it is more often women than men who are victims of human trafficking. Forced labour is another significant reason for human trafficking, and often this includes the trafficking of children.

Asia is a region that is known for human trafficking and, according to World Vision, it is a point of not only origin but also transition and destination. Victims of human trafficking have been discovered in domestic servitude, forced agricultural labour, garment manufacturing, the fishing industry, construction and sex work. As you can see, this is not a limited problem. It has managed to infiltrate a vast number of industries in many different ways. As stipulated in article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

I would like to turn for a moment to an organisation that is passionate about eliminating human trafficking and slavery in Australia. I recently met with the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans here in Canberra. This is a group of men and women, over 8,000 of them, who are passionate about abolishing human trafficking. Their inspiration comes from article 4 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which states:

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

In other words, nobody has the right to treat you as his or her slave and you should not make anyone your slave. This organisation's primary concern is the wellbeing of individuals who have been trafficked into Australia—the victims. The organisation is working towards an improvement in services for these individuals, such as affordable housing, education and appropriate compensation as victims of human rights violations. For women who are brought to this country and then used in the sex trade to be able to create new lives for themselves, they need housing and the opportunity to be educated, and they should also be compensated as victims.

It is obvious that human trafficking remains a huge problem worldwide, and often problems of such magnitude can seem too big to fix. However, World Vision has suggested a number of steps we can all take to help decrease the negative impact of human trafficking. Being informed on this issue will better equip each and every one of us to become more positively involved in finding solutions to this horrific problem. I would encourage everyone in this chamber and those who are listening to keep informed about human trafficking, whether it be through research, reading or keeping a close eye on news and current affairs. This is a widespread problem and it is occurring everywhere.

With the relative affluence and high quality of rights we enjoy here in Australia, we are very privileged and it can be easy to forget that the life we enjoy here is not the reality for so many others around the world. I feel it is our duty to do all that we can to ensure that these crimes against humanity, such as human trafficking, slavery and forced labour, are stopped as quickly as possible. To paraphrase what has been said many times: the only thing necessary for the persistence of evil is for good people to do nothing.

We all often eat chocolate, some of us in this chamber more than others—and I confess that I eat probably too much of it! But that is a trade in which children have been forced into labour. They have fallen victim to unacceptable working conditions. That is why the campaign being run by World Vision in relation to the manufacturing and production of chocolate is so important. It seems like such a simple thing to us here in Australia, but those of us who enjoy partaking of chocolate should be thinking about where it is grown, who harvests it and whether there are children involved.

I do not want it to be said that our generation allowed the continuation of the abhorrent crime of human trafficking. I believe each and every one of us in this chamber has a responsibility, as does each and every Australian, to do all that we can to ensure that we put an end to this devastation of human life. So I would encourage each and every one of us to start conversations today in our communities, to become informed, to educate others and to take action. I would like to conclude with the wise words of Aung San Suu Kyi, who said:

Please use your liberty to promote ours.