

I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians. (Exodus 6:6)



I will deliver you from their bondage. (Exodus 6:6)



Rabbis for Human Rights - North America

Do Justice and Right רבנים למען זכויות האדם - צפון אמריקה

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Bottom of pyramid

Bottom of pyramid





On Pesach, we celebrate the journey of the Jewish people from slavery to freedom. But slavery is not just in the past. Today, more than 27 million people live as slaves, more than any other period in human history. Slavery is all around us, in our communities and in the products we buy. Jewish tradition implores us to protect the stranger, because we were strangers in the land of Egypt. We have an obligation as Jews to hear the voices of some of the most oppressed members of our society.

Here is one story of modern slavery:

A recruiter in Jamaica promised **Sheldon** a visa through the U.S. federal H-2B seasonal worker program. The processing fee was hefty, but the prospect of working in America seemed worth it. Sheldon arrived in Kansas City eager to work, but he ended up at the mercy of human traffickers. Along with other workers from Jamaica, the Dominican Republic and the Philippines, Sheldon cleaned rooms at some of the best-known hotels in Kansas City. The traffickers kept Sheldon in debt, constantly charging him fees for uniforms, transportation and rent in overcrowded apartments. Often, his paychecks would show negative earnings. When Sheldon refused to work, the traffickers threatened to cancel his immigration status, which would render him illegal in an instant. In May 2009, a federal grand jury indicted the leaders of this trafficking ring – including eight nationals of Uzbekistan – on charges related to forced labor in 14 states.

(From the U.S. State Department 2010 Trafficking in Persons Report)

Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude." Today, this is more a hope than a reality.

This year, let us work to free all those still in "Egypt."

This year, RHR-NA will be working to pass a critical piece of American anti-trafficking legislation, the 2012 Reauthorization of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. For more information and to take action, please visit rhr-na.org/pesach.



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Vipul was born into extreme poverty in a village in Bihar, the poorest state in India. His mother was desperate to keep him and his five brothers from starving, so she accepted \$15 as an advance from a local trafficker, who promised more money once 9-year-old Vipul started working many miles away in a carpet factory. The loom owner treated Vipul like any other low-value industrial tool. He forced Vipul and the other slaves to work for 19 hours a day, never allowed them to leave the loom and beat them savagely when they made a mistake in the intricate designs of the rugs, which were sold in Western markets. The work itself tore into Vipul's small hands, and when he cried in pain, the owner stuck Vipul's finger in boiling oil to cauterize the wound and then told him to keep working. After five years, local police, with the help of NGO activists, freed Vipul and nine other emaciated boys.

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I will redeem you with an outstretched
arm and through extraordinary
chastisements. (Exodus 6:6)



I will take you to be my people.
(Exodus 6:7)



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Katya, a student athlete in an Eastern European capital city, dreamed of learning English and visiting the United States. Her opportunity came in the form of a student visa program, through which international students can work temporarily in the United States. But when she got to America, rather than being taken to a job at a beach resort, the people who met her put her on a bus to Detroit, Michigan. They took her passport away, and forced her and her friends to dance in strip clubs for the traffickers' profit. They controlled the girls' movement and travel, kept keys to the girls' apartment, and listened in on phone calls the girls made to their parents. After a year of enslavement, Katya and her friend were able to reach federal authorities with the help of a patron of the strip club in whom they had confided. Due to their bravery, six other victims were identified and rescued. Katya now has immigration status under the U.S. trafficking law. The traffickers are in federal prison.

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Salima was recruited in Kenya to work as a maid in Saudi Arabia. She was promised enough money to support herself and her two children. But when she arrived in Jeddah, she was forced to work 22 hours a day, cleaning 16 rooms daily for several months. She was never let out of the house and was given food only when her employers had leftovers. When there were no leftovers, Salima turned to dog food for sustenance. She suffered verbal and sexual abuse from her employers and their children. One day while Salima was hanging clothes on the line, her employer pushed her out the window, telling her, "You are better off dead." Salima plunged into a swimming pool three floors down and was rescued by police. After a week in the hospital, she was deported. She returned to Kenya with broken legs and hands.

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