

The Global Slave Trade

A Cause for Our Time

BY
INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION

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As Christians, we worship a God who is passionate to rescue the oppressed. He has given us a biblical mandate to “seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow.” (Isa. 1:17) According to a *National Geographic Magazine* article published in September 2003, “there are more slaves today than were seized from Africa in four centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The modern commerce in humans rivals illegal drug trafficking in its global reach—and in the destruction of lives.” Two common forms of modern-day slavery are forced labor and forced prostitution. In both situations, people profit by inflicting horrific abuse on the vulnerable. For victims of slavery, rescue is not an abstract concept but an urgent and desperate need.

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At International Justice Mission, we have the joy of seeing God rescue people out of slavery into a life of freedom. International Justice Mission [IJM] is a collection of lawyers, criminal investigators and trauma social workers who take on individual cases of abuse and oppression referred by ministries and relief and development workers serving among the poor. They bring IJM cases of violence, slavery, sexual exploitation and other forms of oppression. IJM then investigates these cases to bring about four things: rescue and relief for the victims; provision of aftercare to meet their broad and complicated needs; pursuit of justice for the perpetrators; and finally, structural prevention to keep the abuses from happening again.

Forced Labor Slavery

Forced labor slavery is the continual labor of an individual forced to work by mental or physical threat. Forced labor slaves are owned by an employer to whom the slave or slave’s family is indebted. They are forced to

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work long hours, often seven days a week, for meager wages, if any, attempting to pay back a debt that increases at exorbitant interest rates. In reality, there is no way to repay the debt and the laborer becomes essentially a slave for life. Many bonded slaves are children who are beaten and abused if they do not fulfill the extreme expectations of the owner. In 2005, the U.S. State Department reported that cases of forced labor were documented in 112 countries worldwide. According to the International Labour Organization, at any given time in 2016, an estimated 40.3 million people are in modern slavery, including 24.9 million in forced labor and 15.4 million in forced marriage.¹

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IJM investigates and documents cases of forced labor slavery, then works with local law enforcement within the country's legal system to emancipate slaves and bring slaveholders to justice. IJM also works to secure quality aftercare for the victims.

Nagaraj grew up in a brick factory, working as a slave since the age of 12. For him, the worst part was seeing his own children grow up as another man's property. Forbidden to go to school, Nagaraj's children worked exhausting hours alongside other laborers in the searing heat of the kiln. IJM and local authorities raided the brick factory in 2004, resulting in release certificates for 78 people who had been held as slaves. Together with their families, 138 men, women and children were released from the kiln. Nagaraj now owns and operates his own brick kiln, and his children are free to go to school.

Forced Prostitution

Around the world, many women and children are forced into prostitution or sexual slavery, often at the hands of sex traffickers or brothel owners who exploit them for financial gain. Traffickers sell individuals to make a profit in what has become a multi-billion-dollar enterprise. Sex trafficking often consists of the movement of persons across or within borders, but may not entail actual physical displacement. In January, 2020, the International Labor Organization estimated that there are currently 25 million victims of human trafficking around the world.²

IJM investigators spend thousands of hours infiltrating brothels and uncovering the world of sexual exploitation.

¹ <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>

² <https://bankingjournal.aba.com/2020/01/human-trafficking-closer-to-home-than-you-think/#:~:text=The%20International%20Labor%20Organization%20estimates,of%20ABA%20Bank%20Compliance%20magazine.>

IJM staff then work with local authorities to conduct raids and rescue victims from this horrific nightmare, placing them in safe homes where they receive aftercare and begin new lives of freedom. IJM lawyers work to secure the conviction and sentencing of brothel keepers and other perpetrators involved in sex trafficking. These convictions help to deter future perpetrators and change the system that traffics women and girls for sexual exploitation.

When Manna was 14, she ran away from her abusive brother and sought refuge with a woman who promised her a job selling fabric. The woman offered Manna a place to stay for the night but, when Manna woke up the next morning, she found herself in a brothel, forced to sell her body instead of fabric. When Manna refused customers, the brothel keeper pulled her hair, punched her and beat her repeatedly until she gave in to the men who had come to rape her. After two years, Manna and three other young girls were rescued from the brothel by IJM investigators and local authorities. Manna now lives in freedom in an aftercare home, while IJM legal casework led to the conviction and sentencing of her brothel keeper to five years of rigorous imprisonment.

International Justice Mission

International Justice Mission began operations in 1997 when a group of human rights professionals, lawyers and public officials conducted a study to determine the specific needs for public justice advocacy in the developing world. Since then, IJM has established worldwide operational field offices. The incredible suffering of those for whom the law is not enforced is often prevalent in poorer regions where the lack of resources heightens the occurrence of injustice. The teams work in Cambodia, the Philippines, Thailand, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Guatemala and South Asia. IJM is headquartered in Washington, DC, and they have international advancement offices in the U.K., Canada, Germany, Australia and the Netherlands.

You can join International Justice Mission in the fight against injustice by being an agent of change. There are many outlets for people to make significant contributions to the fight against injustice. IJM recognizes the potential of all people to be effective leaders in the fight for international human rights and aims to build a justice generation. Following is a list of some suggested ways to get involved.

What can you do?

Expose: Educate yourself and others about the biblical mandate to seek justice. (begin with Isa. 1:17 and Mic. 6:8)

Explore: Investigate issues of injustice on short-term missions and find ways to seek justice by partnering with the local church.

Engage: Pray for the work of justice, pay for the rescue the poor cannot afford, protect the vulnerable and pursue a career in human rights.

Report a case: Since many *Mission Frontiers* readers may work among the poor in the developing world, situations of injustice are probably familiar to many of you. If you know of a specific case of illegal abuse of power in your country, visit our website <http://www.ijm.org> to report a case.

How can you partner with IJM in prayer?

You can sign up to become a regular prayer partner with IJM and receive weekly e-mails highlighting specific prayer requests for the work of justice. Visit www.ijm.org to sign up for this ministry. Some general requests for IJM's work are listed below:

- Please ask God to inspire and equip local government authorities to combat slavery.
- Please pray for the Christian community in the areas of the world where slavery is rampant. Ask God to bless the local body of Christ with conviction, wisdom and courage so that they might intervene to stop this violence.
- Please ask God to comfort all who are held in slavery and awaiting rescue. Please also pray for the full restoration of those who have been rescued.
- Please ask God to raise up qualified Christian professionals to join IJM or to start their own organization to rescue people from slavery.
- Please pray that God will bring awareness to the body of Christ around the world concerning modern-day slavery, the biblical mandate for Christians to seek justice and the need for financial resources to pay for the rescue the poor cannot afford. 