



U.S. Catholic Sisters **Against Human Trafficking**

Human Trafficking and Major Sporting Events

Awareness

Human trafficking, also known as trafficking in persons (TIP), is a modern-day form of slavery. It is a crime under state, federal and international law. It is currently the second largest type of criminal activity, exceeded only by the illegal drug trade.

There are two major types of human trafficking: (a) sex trafficking, in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act is under 18 years of age; and (b) labor trafficking, which is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery.¹

The links between human trafficking and major sporting events are complex. Human trafficking is largely a hidden crime, making accurate numbers of trafficking incidents difficult to determine. However, many studies have shown that there is an increase in the demand for commercial sex services surrounding large sporting events such as the Super Bowl, World Series, NBA and NHL playoffs, professional golf tournaments, and horse races, as well as college sports and NCAA playoff events.

International sporting events, including the summer and winter Olympics and FIFA World Cup Soccer, increase not only the demand for commercial sex but for labor exploitation as well, especially with the construction of sports venues. With this construction, egregious labor abuses such as wage theft, unsafe working and living conditions, and a lack of access to state-guaranteed social services that affect migrant and foreign workers in particular often occur.²

Why Is this Happening?

An increase in tourists seeking entertainment, including commercial sex, increases the potential risk for exploitation and human trafficking. Traffickers are opportunistic hunters, and they see major sporting events and the hundreds of thousands of people who flock to sports venues as an opportunity for huge profits with very little risk of penalty or punishment. Human trafficking is a business, and traffickers will take advantage of what they perceive to be good business opportunities – including national and international sporting events.



Traffickers “advertise” the availability of commercial sex using online escort ads and social media sites, such as Backpage.com. In monitoring these sites, law enforcement officials have observed that as the date of a major sporting events nears, ads for escorts and commercial sex services increase on a weekly (and sometimes daily) basis.³



However, sporting events are *not* the root cause of human trafficking. The root causes that allow trafficking to flourish are (a) a culture that accepts treating people, especially women and children, as objects that can be bought and sold; (b) poverty, lack of access to education and health care, and desperation which maintain a pool of vulnerable victims; and (c) the ready market for cheap labor and cheap goods.⁴

Human trafficking is a crime that preys on society’s most vulnerable people. Viewing it from a business perspective requires that we consider the relationship of supply and demand to the driving force of profit. No matter how many criminals are prosecuted, there will be other opportunists to step into their shoes. No matter how many victims are rescued, there will still be a steady supply at the ready. So long as the supply, demand, and profit remain unchanged, modern-day slavery will continue. In order for this to change, society must fundamentally alter the equation and make the business of human trafficking the opposite of what it is today: a high-risk, low profit, readily-recognizable crime.



People of all ages, races, religions and nationalities, of all political outlooks, and even sports persuasions – people across every conceivable divide can agree to come together this issue. Human trafficking is a crime against the dignity of the human person. The profit must be squeezed out of both the supply and demand of this equation, and replaced by justice and hope.

Reflection

What resources from our faith tradition reinforce and strengthen us in our work to end human trafficking?

If any of your neighbors are reduced to such poverty that they sell themselves to you, you must not treat them as bonded workers. Their status is to be that of hired hands or resident laborers with you, and they will be subject to you only until the jubilee year. They may then leave your service with their children and return to their own ancestral property. You were all bonded workers in Egypt, and I freed you from your bondage. They must not be sold as bonded workers are sold. You are not to work them ruthlessly; you are to revere Yahweh. (Leviticus 25:39-43)

More Scripture passages: Genesis 37:23-28; Lamentations 5:1, 11, 13, 15; Acts 16:16-19, 23

The trade in human persons constitutes a shocking offense against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights. ...Such situations are an affront to fundamental values which are shared by all cultures and peoples, values rooted in the very nature of the human person. (Pope John Paul II, Letter on the Occasion of the “Twenty-First Century Slavery-The Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings” International Conference, 2002.)

Catholic Social Teaching references: *Guadium et Spes*, Part I, Chapter II, Section 27; Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for the 92nd World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2006; U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Migration, Statement on Human Trafficking, 2007.

The seventh commandment forbids acts of enterprises that for any reason – selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian – lead to the enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold, and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part Three: Life in Christ, Section Two: The Ten Commandments, Chapter Two: “You Shall Love Your Neighbor as Yourself,” Article 7: The Seventh Commandment, paragraph 2414.)



Actions and Resources

Resources for addressing trafficking at major sporting events.

Polaris Project – This organization works on eradicating all forms of human trafficking and serves victims. Polaris Project operates a 24/7 national hotline: 1-888-3737-888 or text BeFree (233733). www.polarisproject.org

Celebration Without Exploitation - Toolkit for Planning Trafficking-Free Sporting (and Other) Events. From the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) Human Trafficking Group. www.iccr.org/resources/2012/CelebrationWithoutExploitationToolkit.pdf

Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution (S.O.A.P.) – SOAP is an Outreach that aims to distribute thousands of bars of soap with the National Human Trafficking Hotline number and key identifying questions FREE to local motels. Volunteers talk to motel owners and managers and provide them with a quick overview of what is happening to young girls in their hotels. <http://www.free-international.org/soap.html>

I’m Not Buying It – This is a national campaign to raise awareness about the trafficking of children. www.traffick911.com/page/im-not-buying-it

Notes:

1. Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-386 (2000), available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10492.pdf>
2. <http://www.indiana.edu/~traffick/trafficking-and-sports-preview-2014/>
3. Klaas Kids Foundation, Backpage.com Multi-State Monitoring Report (Dec. 2011- Jan. 2012); Klaas Kids Foundation, Tackle the Traffickers Outreach and Monitoring Initiative (Feb. 2, 2012 and Feb. 3, 2012).
4. "Economics of Human Trafficking: The Common Thread." September 2012; Sisters of the Holy Cross, Notre Dame, Indiana.