



PREVENTING SLAVERY-LIKE PRACTICES AND IMPROVING WORK CONDITIONS IN LDCS

Liberia, Somalia, Yemen and many many others are in the international community of the "LDCs". Least Developed Countries. These countries suffer from poverty, human resource weakness and economic vulnerability. Among the other problems that these countries have to deal with, an important one is modern slavery. Slavery in its present meaning does not mean what it used to anymore. Slavery is a term that defines a wide variety of unfavorable working conditions for a certain worker, it could be human trafficking, forced labor, slavery or slavery-like practices (a category that includes debt bondage, forced or servile marriage, sale or exploitation of children including in armed conflicts).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 clearly states that "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms." Yet slavery remains a problem, some 67 years later. Why?

To answer this question, we first need to consider which regions are the most problematic. Africa has 34 countries that are listed as LDCs and slavery is present in most of them in various forms. In Africa, the most common is child labor, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO), about 28% of all 5-14 olds are economically active. The region dealing with the worst situation is Sub-Saharan Africa, where a majority of the world's LDCs are located. Truly disturbing is the motivation of the young

workers, who are basically forced to work by their and their parents' economic situation. Poverty is extremely severe in this area and most people are unemployed. It is even easier to find a job as a child than as an adult, children are willing to work more hours, sometimes 12 or more and for an extremely low wage. A vast number of these workers, children or adults, are also under a debt bondage. Debt bondage is a person's pledge of their labor or services as security for the repayment of a debt or other obligation. The services required to repay the debt may be undefined, and the services' duration may be undefined. Debt bondage can be passed on from generation to generation.

Debt bondage is recognized as modern slavery by the United Nations and is prohibited by the international law, specifically by the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery. And yet, debt bondage is a fairly standard method of keeping the work force active and obedient in the Sub-Saharan region as well as in many other parts of the world.

Another noteworthy problem and a modern form of slavery is the infamous human trafficking, mostly found in the southern regions of Africa. Human trafficking is the trade of humans, most commonly for the purpose of sexual slavery, forced labor or commercial sexual exploitation for the trafficker or others.

According to the latest annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report by the US State Department, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi are among the nations that remain sources and destination countries for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. The "Trafficking In Persons Report, June 2013" indicates that the number of global convictions of human traffickers is up about 20 percent, while identified conventions stand at 4,746.

"Sometimes it makes sense to look at an issue by the numbers. In the last year of the global fight against modern slavery, hundreds of new partners - from law firms and local governments to foundations and tech companies - have enlisted in the effort," Luis CdeBaca, , the Ambassador-at-Large to monitor and combat trafficking in persons, writes in the report.

"Dozens of modern anti-trafficking laws have been passed, within the United States and around the world. And millions of dollars have been pledged to this worthy cause," CdeBaca adds.

"Impressive figures, but the number that best characterizes the progress of the anti trafficking movement is sadly still very small. Because reporting is uneven, we can't say for certain how many victims of trafficking are identified each year. This report estimates that, based on the information governments have provided, only around 40,000 victims have been identified in the last year," CdeBaca said.

UN Involvement

The Forced Labor Convention, the full title of which is the Convention Concerning Forced or Compulsory Labor, 1930 (No.29), is one of 8 ILO fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organization. The Convention commits parties to prohibit the use of forced labor, admitting only five exceptions to it. Its object and purpose is to suppress the use of forced labor in all its forms irrespective of the nature of the work or the sector of activity in which it may be. The Convention defines forced labor as "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily"

These are the 5 exceptions:

a) any work or service exacted in virtue of compulsory military service laws for work of a purely military character;

b) any work or service which forms part of the normal civic obligations of the citizens of a fully self-governing country;

c) any work or service exacted from any person as a consequence of a conviction in a court of law, provided that the said work or service is carried out under the supervision and control of a public authority and that the said person is not hired to or placed at the disposal of private individuals, companies or associations;

d) any work or service exacted in cases of emergency, that is to say, in the event of war, of a calamity or threatened calamity, such as fire, flood, famine, earthquake, violent epidemic or epizootic diseases, invasion by: animal, insect or vegetable pests, and in general any circumstance that would endanger the existence or the well-being of the whole or part of the population;

e) minor communal services of a kind which, being performed by the members of the community in the direct interest of the said community, can therefore be considered as normal civic obligations incumbent upon the members of the community, provided that the members of the community or their direct representatives shall have the right to be consulted in regard to the need for such services.

The convention came into force in 1932.

The ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) was supposed to unite the ideas of many previous conventions on the topic of the minimum working age. It states some important points such as: The minimum age for admission to any type of employment

or work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to jeopardise the health, safety or morals of young persons shall not be less than 18 years

The ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) strongly urged all ratifying countries to prohibit all forms of child labor.

Conclusion

Modern slavery is an important issue in today's world and it is not being dealt with very much. It is mostly caused by poverty and bad social situations in certain areas.

What should the UN do to overcome this problem? You will have the opportunity to decide.

FURTHER READING

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48037#.VOdi7uaG9V0>

<http://ilo.org/ipec/Regionsandcountries/Africa/lang--en/index.htm>

http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C029

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2010/September/un-launches-global-plan-of-action-against-human-trafficking.html>

