

09-GS-29 VOTED: The Twenty-seventh General Synod adopts the resolution “A Call to Awareness and Action to End the Practice of Trafficking in Persons.”

**A Call to Awareness and Action
to End the Practice of Trafficking in Persons
A Resolution of Witness
Submitted to the 27th General Synod of the United Church of Christ
by Justice and Witness Ministries (a Covenanted Ministry of the UCC)**

Summary

The Governing Board of the National Council of Churches, USA, approved on September 22, 2008, a “Resolution on Human Trafficking” which calls upon the member communions of the NCC to educate their congregations and advocate for policies that will bring an end to human trafficking, also known as trafficking in persons. This resolution calls upon the United Church of Christ and its congregations to be part of this education and advocacy effort.

Background

Human trafficking, also known as “trafficking in persons,” is the use of force, coercion, fraud or abduction to exploit the person for profit. Victims of human trafficking are subjected to labor and/or sexual exploitation, which may take many forms including debt bondage, commercial sexual abuse of children, prostitution, pornography, bride trafficking, child soldiering, domestic servitude and forced labor. Human trafficking is currently the third largest criminal industry in the world today, after arms and drug dealing. It is also the fastest growing.¹

According to the U.S. Department of State², approximately 800,000 people are trafficked across national borders, not including the millions that are trafficked within their own countries. In the U.S. alone, between 14,500 and 17,500 are trafficked each year. The International Labor Organization also estimates that there are 12.3 million people in forced labor, bonded labor, forced child labor, and sexual servitude at any given time, although there are estimates ranging from four million to 27 million. Trafficking in persons is also referred to as “modern day slavery” since those persons whose labor and livelihoods are exploited are threatened with severe consequences, including death, should they flee the situation.

Women, children and people from poor nations are the most likely targets of human trafficking around the world. In fact, the State Department estimates that more than 80 percent of trafficking victims are women and girls and about 50 percent are under 18 years of age.³ Within the U.S., much of this activity is hidden from public scrutiny or ignored because of the nature of the businesses that utilize trafficked persons (massage parlors, strip clubs, etc.).

In the current global economic crisis, it is likely that there will be an increase in the trafficking of persons as more nations and communities face economic stress.

¹ http://216.128.14.181/polarisproject/trafficking_p3/trafficking.htm

² United States Department of State. (June 2007). “Trafficking in Persons Report” <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/82902.pdf>.

³ U.S. Department of State. (2007).

Biblical and Theological Rationale

Trafficking in persons is a crime against humanity and ultimately a sin. Human trafficking denies the values of human life, exposes victims to serious health risks, endangers the mental well-being of victims and impedes the ability of victims to reach their full God-given potential. As Christians, we believe that every human being is created in the image and likeness of the divine Creator, of God. The prophets cried out against the exploitation of the poor and of laborers who are not treated fairly and compensated justly (Job 24:1-12, for example). The United Church of Christ has consistently upheld the rights and dignity of workers and of women and children, believing that God calls us into community with each other as sisters and brothers, not as exploiters and exploited. The violence done to the physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing of children and women who are forced into prostitution, the pornography industry, sex tourism and other forms of sexploitation are violations of the call of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to love our neighbors as ourselves. The kin-dom of God among us requires us to provide protection for those most vulnerable and to seek conditions which support wholeness and health for everyone.

The Resolution

Whereas trafficking in persons is a global, widespread and illegal practice which violates basic human rights, including the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights, and is a sin against God,

Whereas an estimated 14-18,000 persons are trafficked per year within the United States, often in the communities where we live, work and worship, and

Whereas the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA has called upon its member communions to study and engage in advocacy on issues of human trafficking, and

Whereas women and children represent the largest percentage (80%) of those being trafficked, and

Whereas the United Church of Christ has longstanding commitments to ensuring the basic human rights of all persons,

Therefore, be it resolved that the 27th General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourage its members, congregations and various settings to engage in education about the issue of trafficking in persons and advocacy efforts to end this criminal and abusive practice.

Be it further resolved that Justice and Witness Ministries and Wider Church Ministries will provide resourcing for education and advocacy, including use of the National Council of Churches in the USA's "Social Creed for the 21st Century"⁴; work with international ecumenical bodies and other agencies such as the United Nations Office on

⁴ *Social Creed for the 21st Century* was approved at the NCC General Assembly on November 7, 2007. (<http://www.nccusa.org/news/ga2007.socialcreed.html>).

Drugs and Crime⁵, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)⁶, the Freedom Network USA⁷, and End Child Prostitution and Trafficking USA (ECPAT)⁸ to bring an end to human trafficking in the United States and abroad; monitoring the ongoing funding for the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000⁹; and

Be it finally resolved that local congregations will be encouraged to observe the Sunday closest to January 11¹⁰ as “Human Trafficking Awareness Day” through prayer, reflection, education and actions that will assist in bringing an end to these forms of modern day slavery.

Funding

Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the named agencies and the subject to availability of funds.

Implementation

Justice and Witness Ministries and Wider Church Ministries will collaborate in the implementation of this resolution.

⁵ See <http://www.undoc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/publications.html> for the UNODC *Toolkit to Combat Trafficking in Persons (Second Ed., Oct. 2008)*

⁶ UNICEF (<http://www.unicef.org/protection/index.html>) works to end global exploitation of children, including through the Innocenti Research Center (<http://www.unicef-irc.org/>)

⁷ The Freedom Network USA (<http://www.freedomnetworkusa.org/>) provides in-depth training on all aspects of human trafficking. The UCC will work cooperatively with the Presbyterian Church (US) in setting up trainings for those interested.

⁸ <http://www.ecpatusa.org/>

⁹ Bill #HR270 has been held in the Health Committee of the US House since 2007. It amends the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 to authorize trafficking victims-related appropriations for activities of (1) the Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking; (2) the Secretary of Health and Human Services; (3) the Secretary of State; (4) the President; (5) the Secretary of Labor; (6) the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; (7) the Secretary of Homeland Security; and (8) the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development.

¹⁰ US Senate Concurrent Resolution 40 passed on June 22, 2007 supported the annual observance on January 11th of Human Trafficking Awareness Day.

(<http://www.nccusa.org/news/senateresontrafficking.html>)