

Human Trafficking: Business as Prevention and Restoration

Anya's future should have been bright. Pretty and smart, she loved school – especially languages. Home, however, was a different story.

Anya's father had been an alcoholic for as long as she could remember. Unable to keep a job, his addiction put enormous strain on the family finances, and her mother eventually took work abroad to put food on their table. When she became seriously ill, the burden fell to Anya to provide for her family. Their already difficult situation soon became desperate. Unfortunately for Anya, there were people looking to exploit that vulnerability, and soon she was on her way to Western Europe and a job...in a brothel.

The International Labor Organization estimates that there are 12.3 million people enslaved in forced labor, bonded labor, forced child labor, and sexual servitude in the world at any given time. **Nearly 80% of persons trafficked, like Anya, are used for sexual exploitation.** (UN Office of Drugs and Crime, 2009).

According to the UN protocol, trafficking may be defined as the recruitment, harboring, or transport (**movement**) of people by coercion or inappropriate means (**control**) for exploitation (**money**). Nearly every country in the world is involved in the web of trafficking activities, either as a country of origin, destination, or transit.

Brenda grew up in a polygamous family in Africa. Each wife was expected to provide for her own children within the family, so Brenda's mother was thrilled when an "uncle", a distant clan member, appeared to offer Brenda a job in his business in Europe. Her wages would feed her mother and siblings, and offer the prospect of an education to her younger brothers – and the hope of financial stability to her family. That hope overshadowed the risks which brought her to the dark and dangerous streets where she was forced to offer her body to anyone who could pay.

For Phan, the situation was not disguised. Her brothers had served their time as Buddhist monks to assure their parents' well-being in the afterlife; Phan was expected to care for their needs now. With little education and few connections, Phan went to Bangkok hoping to find work. A job was waiting – in a go-go bar, where Phan performs sexual services for its clients.

Regardless of the differences in their stories and settings, these young women were made vulnerable to the abuse and devastating evil of prostitution by a common need: **a job**. If unemployment and poverty create vulnerability to trafficking, what do solutions look like for Anya, Brenda, and Phan?

Christians worldwide are involved in creating awareness of trafficking in their congregations and communities, developing outreaches and direct services to victims, and promoting good laws in their locales. However, one must ask the question: **out of prostitution and trafficking, into what?** BAM is one of the keys God is using to set women free!

PREVENTION. Poverty and unemployment make people vulnerable to exploitation. BAM businesses offer individuals the opportunity to become self-supporting and self-determining. "Feed me with the food that is my portion," Solomon asks in Proverbs, "...[so] that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God." Without jobs it is difficult to avoid prostitution and other forms of exploitative labour; and without jobs it is nearly impossible to **stay** out.

RESTORATION. BAM businesses offer a 'future and a hope' (Jer. 29:11) to women who may not be welcomed back to their family or home, and a sustainable livelihood in areas

where the minimum wage – in the unlikely event that such a job is available to a former prostitute – is not enough to support oneself. BAM also creates an atmosphere where restoration is possible and pursued, and where employees are given respect and resources on their road to reintegration.

Businesses which embrace God's purposes – and the women and men He has created – are a key to prevention, and an essential part of restoration, for those vulnerable to and victimized by human trafficking. Business people, God needs you!

Jennifer Roemhildt Tunehag

May 2009