Slavery in the Modern Age

Published: July 1, 2011

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Anyone who thinks slavery ended with the 13th Amendment is not paying attention. According to the latest State Department statistics, as many as 100,000 people in the United States are in bondage and perhaps 27 million people worldwide. The numbers are staggering.

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* Times Topic: [Human Trafficking](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/h/human_trafficking/index.html)

These victims of human trafficking are vulnerable men, women or children coerced into servitude for sex or labor. They might be transported from Russia to Europe, from the Philippines to Dubai, or held in their hometown.

The stories are heartbreaking. The Cambodian girl sold to a brothel who was stabbed in the eye by the brothel’s owner when she fought back. The Middle Eastern woman hired as a domestic in London whose employers seized her passport and locked her away in the house. The teenager in Dallas forced into prostitution.

In 2000, the United States enacted an antitrafficking [law](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking/about/TVPA_2000.pdf) and the United Nations adopted the Palermo Protocol. Both call for countries to criminalize trafficking, punish offenders and provide shelter to victims.

In its 2011 trafficking report, the State Department concluded that last year only 32 of 184 countries fully complied with the standards set by the American law. The number on the list of the worst violators rose to 23 from 13. Two close United States allies, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, joined that list of shame.

There has been progress. In the last decade, 146 countries signed the protocol and 128 of those passed laws banning human trafficking. That reflects a growing and encouraging acceptance of a problem once denied.

There is still much to do. All nations should sign the protocol, pass tough national laws and work vigorously to ensure their implementation. Abusers, including firms that hire trafficked employees, must be prosecuted and victims protected. No human being should be enslaved.