

Protect your Youth from Human Trafficking and all forms of Modern Slavery

Human trafficking is a virtual hell for millions of vulnerable people. More than a million people are trafficked every year and around 400,000 women are forced into sex slavery. The world is yet to be ashamed of the perpetuation of slavery in the modern forms: South East Asia is the most vulnerable part of the world for the poor. Countries emerging from decades of war and poverty have to sacrifice their sons and daughters on the altar of monetary greed. This region is gasping for dignity with drug lords, traffickers cynically manipulating governments and systems to their gain - in Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia.

Myanmar has a depressing history of allowing her sons and daughters to be exploited by every nation on the globe. We are a nation of exodus. An exodus designed and executed by man-made disasters –of six decades of the heartless dictatorship that ensured underdevelopment. In the last two decades more than three million people have been forced into unsafe migration. Our youth fled from poverty, war, from persecution, from lack of education, from lack of any employment. Internally and externally 3 millions of our people are away from their homes. Thousands of our girls languish in unknown corners of neighboring countries.

Human traffickers have a great business in trafficking our innocent Myanmar youth. They sold them as commodities: as undocumented workers to plantations in Malaysia, as the underpaid and over exploited maids of Thailand, as objects of desire in the sex markets of Thailand and China, as temporary wives to rich men in nearby countries, to be used as baby factories and thrown back as useless garbage, hundreds coming home shattered in body and soul. Many of our sons and daughters died while smuggled in containers, died trying to cross dangerous borders. They are buried in silent graves. Yet the flow continues. Why?

Only in the last few years, this problem has attracted the attention of Myanmar government. International agencies have been accusing the Myanmar government of indifference to this problem, even accusing individual officials of collusion with human trafficking. Civil rights groups have been accusing the military government on forced labor, failure to protect borders from human traffickers. It was graded to a dangerous level 3 in response to trafficking. That level shows almost absence of any proactive anti trafficking mechanisms.

What makes us sad is even the absence of robust internal mechanisms. Internal trafficking is on the rampant. Girls, especially from the delta are trafficked to industrial and agricultural areas, border towns, mining areas and grey areas in border for casinos and sexual tourism. State and non-State actors in conflict have failed to protect the dignity of the Myanmar girls.

The gentle nature of Myanmar youth is thoroughly exploited by all: traffickers, employers. Men are subjected to servitude and women to sexual exploitation. Border towns are highly vulnerable. The three Kachin bishops from the border dioceses have raised a great alarm over the silent genocide of the youth, falling victims to war, drug and human trafficking.

New Myanmar is on the road to three fold mandate: state building, nation building and peace building. We warmly welcome efforts by the State and Non State actors in reaching consensus on issues. But a state that cannot provide human security to the most vulnerable, by ensuring per capita dignity of safe livelihood, basic education and protected future, is failing in its basic and non-negotiable duty to its citizens. Increased apprehension of a crony capitalism that enriches the rich and frustrates the poor, the neglect of land tenures and customary laws portend more troubles to the vulnerable people. Peace becomes a dream then.

We urge the government, the civil society and religious leaders to embark on a war on this menace of human trafficking. Communities, institutions and faith based groups need to raise awareness on these issues and campaign with the government for a greater role in monitoring borders and airports. Returnees and victims need to be cared for and rehabilitated. We appreciate the recent efforts of the government. But they are inadequate. Reports continue to lament that thousands of Myanmar girls are sold to Thailand and China often into sex slavery. As a new nation, Myanmar should secure its borders, impress upon neighbors for fair treatment of its citizens as per the ILO guidelines and rescue girls from sex industry. Today we as a people and nation stand in utter shame at abuse of our women from border areas. China with its one child policy has millions of men without women for any meaningful married life.

This has produced one of the most obnoxious human trafficking practices evolved in the recent times. Gullible women from war affected areas are purchased by human traffickers and sold at the Chinese borders, with the promise of providing maid jobs. They are transported to remote Chinese villages where old and infirm men, abuse girls, use them to produce babies without their consent. Some of them are resold by these men to other single men. Often the child is taken away from the mother and sent back empty handed and in some cases with infected with dangerous cases. I urge the Myanmar government with a standing army of nearly half a million soldiers, to stop this practice as soon as possible and bring back all the girls married against their wish from Chinese border towns.

We urge the government, to ensure dignity to the poor youth of Myanmar by urgently addressing the root causes. Prevention needs be addressed through an equitable development process, promoting quality education, creating employment opportunities for millions. Make this land, a land of opportunities for all, not only for the rich. We urge that the government ratifies all international conventions. As a church we ensure our whole hearted cooperation in the efforts of the government in wiping out the hell to which thousands of our innocent youngsters are consigned to by heartless mafias.

As Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Holy See Permanent Observer at the United Nations in Geneva remarks: "We need to break the silence about this 'open wound on the body of contemporary society' and motivate

'men and women of good will who want to cry out, Enough!'" he continued, noting that Pope Francis takes every opportunity to denounce the "many abominable forms of slavery [that] persist in today's world" and has "joined with leaders from other major religious traditions to promote the ideals of faith and of shared human values in order to eradicate modern slavery and human trafficking for all time".

Let this country rise to a new dawn of freedom by abolishing all forms of modern slavery.

Press released from the Office of the Archdiocese of Yangon, Archbishop Charles Bo's Statement on Myanmar Human Trafficking, 13 September, 2014