

Modern Slavery

In 2008, a man named Imani Nakpangi was convicted of trafficking a 15-year-old girl. For over two years, Nakpangi sold her daily for sex and controlled her through beatings and threats of violence. By the time he was discovered by police, he had made a personal profit of over \$360,000 from exploiting her.

Many Canadians might be disturbed to learn that human trafficking still exists today — and even more shocked to discover it is happening in their own backyards. Last June, Nakpangi was arrested in the Greater Toronto Area and became *the first person in Canada to be convicted of child trafficking*.

Human Trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation or receipt of people for the purpose of exploitation. The RMCP believes that some 800 victims of trafficking end up on Canadian streets annually. However, as trafficking is a criminal activity, the true number of victims is difficult to determine and remains unknown.

Human trafficking is the third most lucrative criminal activity in the world after drugs and arms smuggling, generating \$10 billion globally each year. The majority of trafficked persons are women and children, who are more vulnerable and easier to threaten and coerce. Trafficking also has an unusually high rate of women perpetrators, many who are or have been victims themselves.

In Canada, victims of trafficking are used as sex workers, agricultural labourers, live-in caregivers, domestic help, and exploited for a variety of other work. People can be more vulnerable to trafficking for a variety of reasons, including poverty, a lack of education, unemployment and a lack of work skills. Aboriginal women and children are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked domestically between provinces for prostitution.

While human trafficking has been a criminal offence in Canada since 2005, there is still much to be done. To date, there have only been two convictions of trafficking in Canada, and both individuals received relatively light sentences of no more than a few years. Currently, 12 more individuals are awaiting trial for trafficking and many worry that they may receive light sentences as well.

However, a private member's bill has recently been introduced to Parliament that would prevent this from occurring. Bill C—268 proposes to impose a mandatory minimum sentence of five years for

proposes to impose a mandatory minimum sentence of five years for those convicted of being involved in the trafficking a child under the age of 18. While the impact of mandatory minimum sentences on crime reduction has been questioned, the bill represents a step in strengthening legislation against trafficking.

Currently, little support or services exist in Canada for victims of trafficking. It is important that trafficked persons not be treated as criminals, and are provided with care and support to help them heal from their traumatic experiences. However, it is important to note that this is a Private Members' Bill, introduced by individual MPs. These types of bills are not likely to be adopted into law and require more advocacy effort to successfully pass. It also reflects the fact that while anti-trafficking legislation may be a priority for individual members of Parliament, it does not appear to be a priority for the government.

A more comprehensive system of policies and programs in Canada is urgently required to fight human trafficking. The involvement of law enforcement, the court system, the immigration and refugee system, health and social services and civil society are all required. This need for action is all the more pressing in light of the upcoming 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, where officials are expecting prostitutes are being smuggled already.

A public justice vision for our society is grounded in the conviction that all people are created to live in dignity as God's image-bearers. Human trafficking is an extreme violation of this dignity, as it turns human life into a commodity that can be exploited for profit and cast away when it is no longer useful. It is abhorrent that this practice, which is often referred to as the "modern-day slave trade," continues to exist. Governments, citizens and civil society all have a role to play in the fight against trafficking to ensure the dignity of all is upheld.

We can do something about it. Yes, we can!

Today, we could sign a petition requesting that Parliament include a minimum punishment, (a term of five years) for offences of trafficking of persons under the age of eighteen years.

This petition will be available at the Welcome Center and in the Hall after the Worship.

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Copy Edited: From *Citizens for Public Justice* by Mariel Angus