



**2010 JOINT WORLD CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL WORK
AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

The Agenda

Human Trafficking - Brief

The Challenge

Approximately 214 million international and 740 million internal migrants are dispersed across the globe in 2010. Trafficking in persons has become a global enterprise as part of this world wide migration. The United Nations estimates that as many as 2.4 million people are now victims of this modern form of slavery. Human trafficking generates an estimated annual income of 32 Billion U.S. dollars. It has a major negative impact on the human rights and freedom of movement of the victims and poses a serious challenge to human security at all levels of society (United Nations, 2009-10).

Human trafficking involves both sexual exploitation and labor exploitation. It includes all ages and genders but the largest number of victims are women and children. Individual victims face coercion, appalling living conditions, physical injury, psychological trauma, and death as a result of the trafficking process. They are often bonded by debt, subjected to physical torture and sexual abuse, and exposed to higher risk of communicable disease with limited or no access to health care and social services. Trafficking starts with recruitment involving deception, coercion and/or abduction at a place of origin, transfer of victims to another destination (often crossing international borders) and finally the exploitation of the victims.

In addition to violating the human rights of the victims, human trafficking creates an environment of violence and crime, separates families, and negatively impacts the social and economic development of communities. Like drug trafficking, it is often facilitated by criminal networks which are a danger to communities and nations as well as the victims themselves. The United Nations (2009-10) points out that trafficking in persons compromises security and impedes human development by weakening the rule of law and undermining health systems in many countries.

The Response

Human trafficking is a global challenge that requires a global response. Fortunately the United Nations has led this response. The U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children

(Palermo Protocol) now ratified by 117 nations has stimulated collaborative efforts to eradicate trafficking. In 2007, the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN GIFT) was launched by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, and in 2009 UNDOC released the International Framework of Action: To Implement the Trafficking in Persons Protocol. This framework is promoting action plans focused on the causes of human trafficking and the vulnerabilities of its victims.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are also playing an important role at the international level. They are helping governments to identify victims of trafficking and offering services such as legal assistance, medical and psychological care, and social services supporting voluntary repatriation and reintegration or integration in the country of destination. International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) are additionally involved in the prevention, education, and post violence aftercare of trafficking victims. Finally, the civil society sector has engaged in advocacy and community building for the establishment or strengthening of public justice systems better able to apprehend and incarcerate traffickers. Close collaboration with law enforcement and the criminal justice system is required to effectively address the global human trafficking challenge.

Social work and social development play very important roles in preventing human trafficking and providing support to its victims. Preventive roles include educating vulnerable populations about the dangers of being exposed to traffickers and advocating with law enforcement for protection of this underserved population. Support roles include identifying victims of this modern-day slavery and providing aftercare services, including rehabilitation and reintegration. Social workers serve as an access point to the health and social service system, and play a key role in helping survivors rebuild their lives. Community support networks are also essential to overcome social exclusion of trafficking victims (Salett, 2006).

References:

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