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Trafficking in human beings: myths and realities

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Slavery was practiced for millennia, from ancient times to transatlantic slave trade and slavery within the colonies. In the 18th century, the strong abolitionist movement started, which called for the abolition of slavery.

In the 19th century, slavery was abolished in Europe. This included the British Empire, where the Slavery Abolition Act was enacted in 1833. In the 20th century, an international treaty called the Slavery Convention 1926 was created, prohibiting the practice of slavery.

In 1948, the first international human rights instrument, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was adopted. It states that all human beings are born equal in dignity and rights. And it prohibits slavery in all its forms.

Although slavery is legally prohibited, it continues in the 21st century. Trafficking in Human Beings, or THB, is a form of modern slavery. It is a crime which also has a strong human rights dimension. In short, it involves the recruitment of the victim and their transportation to another state or within the same state for the purposes of exploitation.

THB is defined in the protocol to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime to prevent, suppress, and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Trafficking involves three elements-- the act, the means, and the purpose. THB is a process that involves several stages and several perpetrators.

The act-- firstly, a person is recruited. The trafficker can be a recruitment agency representative who promises an attractive and well-paid job to the person whilst knowing that the person will be exploited.

However, this act can also be done by a person who may have already known the victim. It is not uncommon for a victim to be recruited by a neighbor, a friend of a friend, or even a family member. Following that, a person is transported to another place in the country or transferred across state borders to another country.

The means-- deception is an important part of the process of trafficking. A person may be told that they are going to work abroad-- for example, in agricultural work, in a factory, or as an au pair. Very often, the victim believes that they will receive a fair remuneration for their work.

Traffickers establish control over their victims. Victims are often subjected to threats, physical and sexual violence, and degrading treatment. Many have their identification documents taken away to prevent them from leaving the country.

The purpose-- one of the key purposes of THB is sexual exploitation, mainly of women and children. However people are trafficked for other types of exploitation, too. For example, the victims may be trafficked for agricultural work, forced domestic labor, cultivation of cannabis, forced marriage, organ transplants, or begging.

Trafficking happens worldwide every year. Victims of trafficking may not always be visible, but they are present everywhere. For example, they may be on the same flight as you or may be working in the hotel where you are staying. If you suspect that slavery is happening near you, you should call the police.

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