

Photo by Kay Chernush for the U.S. State Department.

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### Keeping the vulnerable safe from human trafficking

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# PROMOTING AND PROTECTING HUMAN DIGNITY

Human trafficking is a hidden and brutal form of modern-day slavery. Traffickers employ violence and deception to force people to work under slave-like and severely exploitative conditions. Traffickers recruit vulnerable people for the most dangerous and degrading kinds of work. Those who are trafficked know that trying to escape could mean death for themselves, their families or their fellow workers.

Trafficking does not exist in isolation. It is closely connected to the economic, political and social forces that increase the vulnerability and desperation of the poor. An assault on human dignity, trafficking turns people into disposable commodities. Trafficking disproportionately affects poor women, children and members of disadvantaged ethnic minority groups.

Catholic Relief Services has been working with our partners across the globe to address this atrocity.

## ABOUT THE COVER:



In South Asia, many carpet weavers are from the lowest caste in society. Often, an offer is made to place a loom in a family's hut so they can pay off their debt, but this only ensures their servitude for generations.

*“The trade in human persons constitutes a shocking offence against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights. Such situations are an affront to fundamental values which are shared by all cultures and peoples, values rooted in the very nature of the human person.”*

— Pope John Paul II

from remarks at the international conference, *Twenty-First Century Slavery — The Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings*

We are now responding to the problem of trafficking in almost every region where we work.

CRS supports prevention programs, provides safe shelters and care for emotional and physical recovery, treats people living with HIV/AIDS and other resulting diseases, provides skills and vocational training, and promotes protection of potential victims.

“It’s going to take a very sustained and widespread effort,” says Mary DeLorey, part of CRS’ Policy and Advocacy Department. “Human trafficking is a profound human rights violation and abuse of human dignity. To date, trafficking has been a high-profit, low-risk enterprise. People can be sold again and again, and laws against trafficking in many countries do not exist or are not enforced.” ■

## Broken Promises, Shattered Lives

It is increasingly clear that children who are not in school are far more likely to become victims of human trafficking. Because girls have such limited access to education in many countries, they are in particular danger. Street kids disappear easily and with little notice from anyone in authority. Trafficked child laborers have few protections against the worst forms of abuse and servitude.

War zones and disaster areas too often provide traffickers with a convenient pond in which to cast their nets for new victims. The bait for women and girls can take the form of classified ads and posters searching for poor or uneducated people desperately looking for work: “No experience or high school diploma necessary. No minimum age required. On-the-job training provided.”



The end result is that people seeking a better life, particularly women and children, end up being exploited and abused. Girls can be considered a financial burden by their families if they are not providing additional income. In such cases, parents sometimes encourage their daughters to help the family monetarily by going after jobs that turn out to be dangerous or illegitimate.

CRS is fighting the scourge of human trafficking by addressing the root causes of poverty that place the vulnerable in harm’s way. Poverty forces desperate people to take risks even in full knowledge of the dangers because they believe — often correctly — that they have no other options. ■

## The Challenge We Face

- Human trafficking is the fastest-growing criminal industry in the world.
- After guns and drugs, human trafficking is the most lucrative illicit business.
- Trafficking in humans is a \$10-billion growth industry.
- It is estimated that between 700,000 and 2 million people, principally women and children, are trafficked around the world every year.
- About 10 million trafficked people, especially women and children, are currently surviving and working at risk.

## There Is So Much We Can Do!

By Christine Baranski

In January 2006, the award-winning actress visited a CRS-supported trafficking prevention project in India.

The worldwide problem of sex trafficking of women and children is a human tragedy. This confounds me because I'm a woman and I've raised two daughters, working hard to educate, protect and guide them.

It is hard to conceive that in many parts of the globe the daughters of other women live in such poverty. They not only have no opportunity for an education but are not protected from the horrors of forced marriage, child labor and, worst of all, sexual slavery.

In India alone, millions of young women and children are living in brothels, "working" in small windowless rooms. Drugged, beaten and repeatedly raped, they emerge later HIV-positive, unwanted by their families and rejected by their society.

Some extraordinary people working at CRS in India arranged for me to meet a remarkable woman, named Dr. Sunitha Krishnan, who has devoted her life to the rescue and rehabilitation of victims of sex trafficking. Through her CRS-supported organization, Prajwala, she provides shelter, psychological counseling, education and vocational training.

My 22-year-old daughter Isabel and I visited Prajwala, which means "Eternal Flame." On a trip filled



Photo by CRS/India staff

with so many moving moments, I remember our first day. In a small three-story building on a back street of the old city of Hyderabad, we entered a labyrinth of rooms each filled with 20 or more children taking their classes on a concrete floor. They greeted us with smiling faces.

These were the children of prostitutes — women who wanted only that their own children receive an education so they can escape the fate of their mothers. I asked Sunitha the cost of a year's tuition for one child. "Two hundred American dollars," she said.

At every stop in our journey we met resilient, often-courageous human beings who wanted nothing so much as an education. It was their way out of the living hell of poverty and prostitution.

What has now become unimaginable to me is that we ignore not just their suffering but also their hope for a dignified life.

There is so much we can do.  
There is so much we must do! ■

## Promoting Self-Worth in Moldova



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Moldova is one of the poorest countries in all of Europe. The average per capita annual income is less than \$400, and 80 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.

Unable to support themselves or their families, many people view migration as their only option to make a living.

In Moldova, women between the ages of 16 and 45 are at great risk of trafficking, in part because they are so poor and have few educational or job opportunities. So many women choose to leave Moldova, yet they have few safe, dignified or legal migration options.

As Michael McKennett, program director for CRS in Moldova, explains, "The violence that [these women] experience is beyond what anyone may conceive is even possible. They are subject to terrible diseases, including AIDS," he said.

"At times, those who have been rescued find themselves back in a trafficking situation. The atmosphere of degradation and terror has become normal and familiar for them, making it difficult for them to recognize when they are in a dangerous and abusive situation."

Michael is a strong advocate for building job opportunities for the women here. Through the Moldova Employment and Training Alliance (META), CRS/Moldova provides legitimate jobs and services to young Moldovan women, many of whom are victims of trafficking. This program also helps women build life skills that promote their sense of self-worth and independence. ■

# GLOBAL UPDATE



## ✓ Nigeria

Poverty, illiteracy and unemployment are leading factors for trafficking in Nigeria. Typically, a trafficker approaches a girl or young woman with the promise of gainful employment or educational opportunity in Europe. Given their impoverished state in Nigeria, it is hard for victims to say no. Girls as young as 12 are prime targets because they are considered less likely to be infected with the HIV virus. Women and children are shocked to discover their job is to work the streets. They are then forced to earn back the money their “benefactor” spent on their passage.

CRS and the Catholic bishops of Nigeria are committed to fighting trafficking and bettering the lives of all Nigerians by promoting human rights and education. Together, we are also raising awareness and attacking the root causes of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. The Nigeria Conference of Women Religious



CRS photo by Krista Threefoot

has been in the forefront of efforts to end trafficking in the country.

Mothers are encouraged to keep track of their daughters’ whereabouts at all times. The youth of Nigeria are being educated about the horrible fate that awaits them overseas if they accept this “dream opportunity.” And the Nigerian bishops continue their efforts to speak to the consciences of the business people responsible for this crime against humanity.

## ✓ India

Thousands of children who were orphaned by the catastrophic tsunami in December 2004 became vulnerable to human

traffickers. The tsunami took away many people’s ability to earn a living. This desperate atmosphere put many women at risk. CRS’ Suraksha project is our preventive response to this serious problem affecting communities in India.



Photo by CRS Staff

The Suraksha program helps prevent trafficking by promoting education. It ensures that children are in schools and all adolescent girls receive vocational education. Through this project, women and children in 600 tsunami-affected communities are being protected in shelters. They also have improved access to quality education and vocational skills training. Women and children who have been victims of trafficking are receiving support, rehabilitation and the chance to begin their lives again.

## ✓ Romania

Many of Romania’s pockets of poverty are breeding grounds for trafficking. Very high unemployment and a shortage of job opportunities put many people at risk. School-age children

are particularly vulnerable. CRS’ partner, Caritas Bucharest, is working to keep children safe through school-based programs that put youth at the helm of trafficking prevention initiatives.

Our efforts encourage parents, teachers and communities to become more involved in protecting the innocent through youth-led, child-centered activities in nine high schools. School core groups comprise students, parents and teachers employing innovative strategies to educate the school and community about how to reduce trafficking risks.



Photo by CRS Staff

One goal of school-based actions, together with Caritas Bucharest’s increased collaboration with other faith-based counter-trafficking activities is to trigger similar civic activities throughout Romania. Now more Romanians are taking civic responsibility and volunteering for prevention campaigns. The result is that more vulnerable children are safer. ■

# Beating the Odds: Escape from a Slave-Labor Camp

After 117 years of official abolishment, slavery — in the form of human trafficking — still exists in Brazil. In October 2005, José, a 27-year-old, was enticed to work on soybean farms in Amazonia. Lack of jobs forces many young boys and men to accept work that will take them far from home, working for minimal wages.

José was promised food, lodging and equipment. But, on reaching the farm, he realized he had been deceived. Instead of a room, he found a thatched shack that was to be shared by 20 others, with no toilets, no bedding, dirty water and only a hammock to sleep on after a 17-hour day of planting soy in the fields.

But what was most shocking for José was that he was required to pay for his stay, food and equipment. This put him in debt to the owner even before he began work. With little or no money to pay off his debt and no money to return home, José, like all the others, got trapped in a cycle of debt that could never be paid off.

One day José found the courage to question his boss. In response he was threatened at gunpoint. Fearing

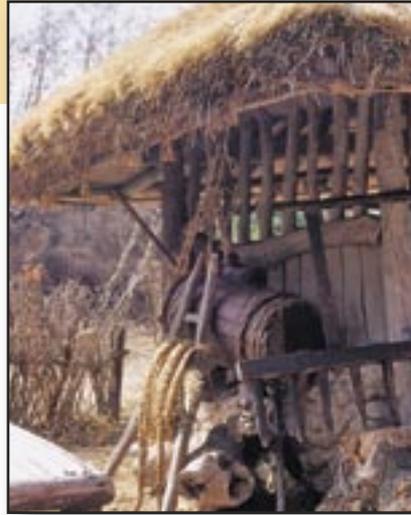


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for his life, he escaped into the forest, where he wandered for two days before reaching a highway. José was rescued and taken to a CRS-supported human rights center where he told his story. The CRS partner contacted the authorities that find and prosecute labor-law abusers. They located the farm and began criminal proceedings against the plantation owner. By telling his story, José made liberation possible for 20 other men.

This CRS/Brazil project, called Trails to Liberty, provides services to freed slave laborers, helps them find jobs, and works to prevent young and old from falling into this exploitative trap. ■



## *The Story of the Wooden Bell*

*The Wooden Bell™ takes its name from a Haitian proverb: “Nobody hears the cries of the poor, or the sound of a wooden bell.” CRS donors not only hear the cries of the poor, but answer with compassion.*

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