

# Modern Day Slavery

The death of 39 people inside a refrigerated container vehicle in Essex has highlighted once again, this terrible crime.

Every year, millions of children, women and men fall into the hands of traffickers, lured by fake promises and deceit. Human trafficking has become a global multi-billion-dollar enterprise, affecting nearly every country in the world. Today, there are millions of people whose liberty, dignity and essential human rights have been stolen. They are coerced into sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude, forced begging and stealing.

This is a subject close to my heart, as in 1992 I headed a detention centre in Hong Kong, which at its peak housed around 11,000, of what were known as Vietnamese Boat People. Many of them had paid huge sums of money to traffickers to take an arduous journey from Vietnam to other countries in South East Asia in search of a better life. Some 230,000 people arrived, but many never made it, as most other countries in the region would not accept them. Many lost their lives after literally being pushed back out to sea by the countries concerned.

For the criminal groups involved in human trafficking, the people being trafficked are treated as a “commodity” as is in the case of drug trafficking, with no regard to transportation conditions. The aim is to make money, and there is much to be made, sometimes up to tens of thousands on Euros for the journey.

The victims are “promised” that once in the destination country they will become employed and send money to their relatives at home. In reality however they become slave labour, and any earnings go to the criminal groups concerned.

## **Distinction between Human Trafficking and People Smuggling**

According to the United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Human trafficking involves the recruitment, movement or harbouring of people for the purpose of exploitation. It can be within the same country or across borders. Victims are trafficked by the use of improper means such as the threat or use of force, fraudulent schemes, deception, or abuse of power.

People/Migrant smuggling is a crime that takes place only across borders. It consists in assisting migrants to enter or stay in a country illegally, for a financial or material gain.

## **Situation in Portugal**

In a recent European Commission report it was noted that in 2015-2016, Portugal had a higher proportion of labour trafficking victims per one million of the population than any other European state barring Malta. In fact, the Commission found that an estimated 65% of human trafficking victims in Portugal fall victim to labour exploitation.

The second largest group of trafficking victims are subject to sexual trafficking which accounts for 28% of known victims. The Portuguese authorities estimate that those numbers are just the tip of the iceberg with many more people passing unnoticed in the country.

A majority of trafficking victims are males; 57% against 43 % of females. The vast majority 83% are adults. Most come from countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, India and Eastern Europe, (particularly Bulgaria and Romania) or countries in West Africa.

SEF regularly conducts operations against this form of trafficking. In addition on 18<sup>th</sup> October they co-hosted with Europol a conference in Lisbon dealing with this subject focusing on the help available to victims. Safe Communities met last month with the Deputy National Director SEF and discussed this subject.

### **Tackling the criminal groups involved**

Success in tackling Human Trafficking can only be achieved by bringing to justice the organised criminal groups involved. This means extensive international police co-operation often with the assistance of Interpol or Europol.

One major success was the recent arrest of Saifullah al Mamun, a Bangladeshi native considered to be the world's largest human trafficker. He was one of eight detained in a Brazilian Federal Police operation against migrant trafficking. His arrest also gives an insight into the complex schemes used by such traffickers to try and evade capture.

Mamun was on Interpol's "blacklist" and was caught in Brás, central São Paulo, on suspicion of leading an illegal scheme to transport South Asian people to the United States via Brazil. For the route, it charged each person the equivalent of €10,000.

Investigations began in May 2018 following an anonymous complaint to the Federal Police, which collaborated with the US Immigration authorities. The operation, called "Estação Brás" in Brazil, took place simultaneously in both countries.

Traffickers kept in touch with taxi drivers through WhatsApp and Messenger, and sent pictures of the victims so drivers could recognize them on arrival and take them to Brazil's border with Peru, passing through nine countries.

### **How can we help?**

Human trafficking may be closer to us than we think - some of the goods we consume may have been the product of victims of trafficking.

Everyone can play a role in identifying victims of human trafficking. Health care and social service providers; law enforcement officials; and ethnic, community, and faith-based organizations may encounter victims through their work. An informed community member could also be a victim's link to freedom. It is important to be vigilant and to "look beneath the surface" in situations that don't seem quite right. One chance encounter could be a victim's best hope for rescue. There are many signs

Some indicators are: Evidence of being controlled either physically or psychologically; Inability to leave home or place of work; Inability to speak for oneself or share one's own information; Information is provided by someone accompanying the individual; Loss of control of one's own identification documents; Have few or no personal possessions; Owe a large debt that the individual is unable to pay,

If you suspect someone of being a victim of human trafficking help them by reporting your suspicions to police.