

# Rotarians against Child Slavery

*LA Newsletter for the proposed Rotarian Action Group – See website [www.racsrag.org](http://www.racsrag.org)*

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“You may never know what results come from your action, but if you do nothing there will be no result” (Gandhi)



## Slavery – political or moral issue ?

A couple of weeks ago I gave a presentation on “Child Slavery” to one of the Rotary Clubs in my District. During question time one member argued that Rotarians should not be involved with anti-slavery work because slavery was a political issue. I was relieved to find that the majority of

those present disagreed with his viewpoint.

If we had been living in the late eighteenth century, he may have had some supporters because at that time the slave trade was as fundamental to the economy of several countries as oil is today.

But that is no longer the case.

The monetary value of slavery relative to the world economy is very small and most slave-based revenues flow to support not national economies or trans-national industries, but individuals, greedy people and small scale criminal networks

## The time is ripe to end slavery

The 19<sup>th</sup> century slavery abolitionists not only achieved their goals, they also helped to establish a human rights paradigm upon which all subsequent struggles for justice have been built. It is unaccept-

able that today we do not show the same audacity of ambition in trying to end the struggle that they began. If ever there was a tipping point where slavery is ripe for extinction, it is definitely

now. Certainly many of the obstacles faced by the abolitionists of the past have already been removed so we have no excuse to allow this evil practice to continue.

## The obstacles have been removed

First, as we have already noted, there is no longer an economic argument to be won. The end of slavery threatens no country's livelihood, and the cost of ending slavery is just a fraction of the amount that freed slaves will pump into the economy.

The second advantage for today's abolitionists is that the moral argument is already won. Every country condemns slavery and no

ethnic majority or powerful religious group argues that slavery is desirable or acceptable.

The third great advantage is that there is no legal argument to be won. For the most part, the necessary national and international laws are already on the books. Around the world some of these laws need updating and expanding and some need their penalties

increasing, but nowhere on earth is slavery legal. Indeed today's struggle to end slavery should be easier than the struggle facing the 19th century abolitionists.

We do not have to violate laws to help victims as the early abolitionists did. Bringing an end to slavery merely requires the political will to enforce laws, not campaigns to make new ones.

## Governmental action is increasing



Child Slaves fishing on Lake Volta. Ghana



Enslaved in a carpet factory

In the last edition of the Newsletter I reported on a landmark child slavery case in Ghana where for the first time that country's 2005 anti-trafficking law has been used to convict a child trafficker in the fishing industry where slavery is common.

On the global front we know that shortly, the International Labour Organization, which is part of the United Nations, will discuss the establishment of a new convention on domestic work at its annual conference in June. This represents an

historic and rare opportunity to increase legal protection for domestic workers, reduce their vulnerability to slavery and end their abuse

Good things are also happening in India. I have just heard that this month, the Indian Parliament has implemented the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009. This means that every boy and girl now has the right to challenge the Government or any other organisation or individual which robs them

of their right to education.

Education is one of the key elements in a strategy to reduce human trafficking. The two little 6 year old boys (H & S) whose story I recounted in a previous Newsletter, would not have been enslaved for 5 years in a carpet factory if they had been at school.

## Schools are a defence against slavery

So many children who are enslaved are tricked into it. The con men of slavery know exactly how to lure vulnerable children into bondage. But if those children were at school, it would be more difficult for traffickers to acquire their victims. We therefore need to give our support to those organisations which are trying to build schools in countries where both poverty and slavery are prevalent. The two are inextricably linked.

In the last edition of the Newsletter we read about child slavery on Lake Volta in Ghana. In this edition I would like to tell you about an organization which is trying to build schools in northern Ghana to alleviate poverty and to protect children from the clutches of slave holders.

## The Wulugu Project in Ghana

The Wulugu Project works to reduce poverty through education in a deprived area of Northern Ghana. It began with a chance meeting in Japan in 1993 between a head teacher from Ghana and Lynne Symonds, a teacher from Norfolk, England. She heard about extreme poverty in Ghana, the lack of education, and the many children kept at home and vulnerable to slavery because there was no money to buy exercise books, pencils or school uniforms.

Initially Lynne started raising funds to send equipment to Wulugu Secondary School, giving the charity its name. Since then the Wulugu Project has built and equipped nine new primary schools, provided hostels for teachers and girls in rural areas and constructed four vocational schools for girls, bringing them back into education from virtual slavery and giving them a real

## **The Wulugu Project (Continued)**

In summary by providing educational opportunities in more than 100 villages, over 200,000 children have been helped out of the cycle of poverty and protected from slaveholders.

Below is a message of thanks from Ghana for the Wulugu Project's approach to slavery.

*"Illiteracy and poverty are the main determinants of child slavery. In Northern Ghana over 90% of heads of family are illiterate and have very many children who are not sent to school, and children who are not in school form a good source of slaves*

*The social system and the extended family systems have broken down. When these cultures were working every child was taken care of even if the immediate parents were poor. But now the land has become impoverished and parents sell their children to people for very meagre sums of money.*

*Trucks have been stationed in villages to collect young girls from the North to be used as house helps. Sometimes, some of these maids after having stayed long with their masters or mistresses are given attractive gifts to send back to the village to entice new children for trafficking. The girls are exploited, abused and often end up in prostitution to pay for food.*

*Since the intervention of 'Wulugu Project', opportunities have been open for younger children to go to school. Five vocational schools have helped greatly in minimising the number of girls that go to the urban areas. Parents have actually gone to the South to bring back their children to attend these vocational schools. Wulugu' works in collaboration with Ghana Education Service and is achieving great results especially with the vocational schools where the results are immediate, bringing back many girls from the South to train them in locally employable skills such as dress making, typing, computer studies, weaving and batik tie and dye as well as literacy, numeracy and nutrition and family care.*

*We are grateful to the donors for the support they have given Wulugu Project since 1995. We would even be more grateful if some of our donors could make trips to come and see what their efforts have done in changing lives."*

(Karimu Nachina, Project Coordinator for Wulugu)

For more information on the Wulugu Project and how you can help, please visit <http://www.wulugu.co.uk/>. If you wish to find out a little more about the background to the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 in India please visit the Action Group's website which is [www.racsrag.org](http://www.racsrag.org).

***"Be the change you want to see in the world" (Gandhi)***

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Action Group's Website: [www.racsrag.org](http://www.racsrag.org).

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