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Human trafficking is the illegal movement of people against their will. It takes two common forms – sex and labor trafficking. The most widely accepted definition of human trafficking comes from the Palermo Protocols; adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000 and accepted by over 150 countries, these Protocols define human trafficking as:

“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”

The two factors that drive the spread of human trafficking are high profits and low risk to the perpetrator. Human trafficking is similar to drug and arms trafficking, as it is a market-driven criminal industry that is based on the principles of supply and demand. Traffickers make billions of dollars in profits every year. All of the money is made by victimizing and abusing innocent people.

Sex trafficking is a form of human trafficking and is equivalent to modern day slavery. It exists throughout the United States and globally. The latest global estimate according to the International Labor Organization (the United Nations agency that deals with global labor issues), calculates that nearly 21 million people are victims of human trafficking worldwide. Roughly 4.5 million of those victims are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The most

significant number of victims are said to come from Asia and the Pacific region, although human trafficking in Africa continues to grow when compared to its 2005 estimates. As of 2012 men accounted for 40% of labor trafficking cases worldwide. The International Labor Organization also estimates that 55 percent of all trafficking victims and 98 percent of sex trafficking victims are women and girls.

Exploitation is at the heart of human trafficking. Sex traffickers use violence, threats, lies and debt bondage to force victims to engage in commercial sex against their will. In the case of sex trafficking, exploitation implies the forced prostitution or sexual abuses of vulnerable men, women, and children. The United States' Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) declares it a crime to coerce, force, or mislead men, women, and children into sex slavery. Under federal law it is illegal to use or induce into commercial sex, minors under the age of eighteen years old; regardless of use force, fraud, or coercion.

Sex traffickers may lure their victims with the false promise of a high-paying job. Others promise a romantic relationship, where they first establish an initial period of false love and feigned affection. During this period they offer gifts, compliments, and sexual and physical intimacy, while making elaborate promises of a better life, fast money, and future luxuries. However, the trafficker eventually employs a variety of control tactics, including physical and emotional abuse, sexual assault, confiscation of identification and money, isolation from friends and family, and even renaming victims.

U.S. citizens, foreign nationals, women, men, children, and LGBT individuals can be victims of sex trafficking. Runaway and homeless youth, victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, war or conflict, or social discrimination are frequently targeted by traffickers. Sex

trafficking exists within diverse venues including fake massage businesses, online escort services, residential brothels, strip clubs, hotels, motels, in truck stops and unfortunately even on city streets.

Although human trafficking may not be directly discussed during the presidential debates, these debates will cover several major issues that directly or indirectly provide the ingredients for the problem to proliferate. The deficits in mental health care, funding for jobs, education, and homelessness can create situations in which people become easily victimized. Poverty, unsafe foster homes, lack of psychological counseling, and the search for jobs, housing, and acceptance / love are not unique to any one state, city or rural town. We find these issues in communities across our nation, just as we can find examples of human trafficking in most communities. Yet, we often choose to turn a blind to them.

Trafficking is a lucrative industry. It is second only to drug trafficking as the most profitable illegal industry in the world. There is not an organized lobby against human trafficking. It unfortunately seems to be regarded as just another societal ill. . While it is being addressed through federal legislation, it is being left to local municipal police and district attorneys to enforce the laws. For these reasons, the U.S. Federal Government has seen minimal progress in the fight against trafficking. Federal anti-trafficking efforts have many action plans and departments with good intent, but struggle to effectively eradicate this evil.

Rather than be a subcategory in debates, human trafficking should be a primary topic of discussion. We should all join the conversation and actions to stop human trafficking and end modern-day slavery through engagement. Simply praying for victims is not enough. We should be raising awareness, advocating for policy reforms, and seeking to aid organizations who are

combating this injustice. We will not make headway in reducing the volume of this extensive issue until it is no longer seen as other people's problem.