**Human Trafficking: New Trends**

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“Human trafficking is not only an injustice to the victim, but it is an injustice unto the families and friends of that victim”-Asa Don Brown

The world today is in turmoil. A cursory look around would show signs of unrest, dissatisfaction, economic melt-downs, rising inflation, armed disputes, political upheavals, pandemics, terminal diseases, accidents, refugees and one of the most disturbing elements-human trafficking. We trade in commodities meant for the benefit of humans but when we trade in humans, we are actually degrading mankind to the level of disposable goods. This is the standard of appreciation we hold for our species. Not that this is a recent development. Human trafficking is linked to the oldest known profession-prostitution. “Traffickers will stop when men stop buying women,” said Corban Addison in his novel, A Walk In The Sun.

Disregarding earlier slave trades and taking a cue from Lou de Baca, U.S. Ambassador at Large, Office to Combat and Monitor Human Trafficking, “When bad things happen to men we say it’s terrible, but when bad things happen to women we say that’s just a cultural practice”. So long as women were the main stock-in-trade, this uproar was not as intense as when children and men began to be included in the human merchandise as sex workers and drug carriers. As late as 1997, two divisions of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) were merged to form the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, renamed in 2002 as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) which publishes reports focusing on trafficking in and abuse of illicit drugs, crime prevention and criminal justice, international terrorism and political corruption.

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According to the global report, published in February 2009, data was gathered from 155 countries determining the scope of human trafficking and measures taken for its control. At the launch of this report in New York, then Executive Director of UNODC, Antonio Maria Costa said: “Many governments are still in denial. There is even neglect when it comes to either reporting on or prosecuting cases of human trafficking”. Without admitting the occurrence and magnitude of any crime, it is impossible to chalk out strategies to fight them. Relying on fake moral presumptions of society is like providing a curtain to conceal whatever filth is lurking behind. In the light of the report that has increased our understanding of modern slave markets while simultaneously exposing our level of ignorance, Mr Costa complained about the government’s attitude toward some countries in the following words: “We have a big picture, but it is impressionistic and lacks depth. We fear the problem is getting worse, but we cannot prove it for lack of data, and many governments are obstructing”. Apparently, there is a lack of political will.

The Report provides a break-up of human trafficking as 79% related to sexual exploitation dominated by females and 18% as forced labour, a figure that could be deceptive as not all cases of forced labour can easily be detected. 20% of all worldwide victims comprise children and in some parts of Africa and the Mekong region, they are in majority with 100% in some parts of West Africa. The report also clarifies that human trafficking does not actually imply cross border movement of persons as relevant information shows that intra-regional and domestic trafficking constitute major forms of trafficking. As stated by Asa Don Brown, “People who are trafficked are often the most vulnerable in our society”.

In this entire multi-billion dollar industry, quite a disturbing and inhuman trend is being observed as emerging in recent years pertaining to refugees moving across continents. One needs to be aware that the crime of human trafficking has three core elements: the act, the means, and the purpose but the principal objective is exploitation that can take place in a victim’s home country, in a foreign country or during migration, which again can be legal or as in the case of frustrated men and women, illegal. In their struggle to abandon their distressful lives back home, many end up being captured in foreign lands. They are either deported by border security forces and provided shelter where authorities are sympathetic but in worse scenarios, they are humiliated, trafficked or killed as they are easy means of supplying vital organs for the indisposed wealthy.

In the article ‘Organ Trafficking and Migration: A Bibliometric Analysis of an Untold Story’ written by Juan Gonzales, Ignacio Garijo and Alfonso Sanchez, the authors have suggested that the trafficking of human beings for the purpose of organ removal (THBOR) remains largely absent from policy debates, as this crime is hardly identified, reported and rarely researched. They give the example of Lebanon wherein in 2017 a number of cases pertaining to organ trafficking were uncovered. These involved Syrian refugees who were frantically trying to support themselves and their families. They further mention that in 2018, the International Labour Organization (ILO) asserted that about 40 million people were victims of human trafficking out of which 90% were for sexual exploitation, while the remaining 10% were for other purposes including organ removal.

Like helpless women and children, refugees also fall in the most vulnerable category that can be subjected to human/organ trafficking especially when they are deprived of being re-registered as such in a second country by the United Nations as happened with Pakistanis escaping from Syrian civil war and taking refuge in Lebanon. Organ brokers find them most suitable for their nefarious activities as they are forced to sell their body parts like in the case of a seventeen years old Syrian boy, the only surviving male member who agreed to sell his right kidney for US$ 8000 to support his mother and five sisters. The authors lament about lack of academic attention towards this growing inhuman trade as apparent from the detection of only 700 victims of THBOR from 25 countries between 2006 and 2019.

150 scientific researchers from 78 countries participated in the International Summit on Transplant Tourism and Organ Trafficking convened by the Transplant Society and International Society of Nephrology in 2008. Popularly known as Istanbul Declaration, it concluded that transplant commercialism aimed at vulnerable transplant tourism and organ trafficking should be prohibited urging governments to take concrete steps to prevent the poor and vulnerable from being forced to sell their organs but the fact is that governments all around the world have paid little attention to these pleas as human and organ trafficking continue to rise unabated.

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