

**WRJ BOARD OF DIRECTORS
STATEMENT ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING
(Approved March 6, 2017)**

“This year we are slaves; next year, may we be free.” (Passover Haggadah)

“No one should be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all forms.” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 4)

“I had not then learned the measure of ‘man’s inhumanity to man’, nor to what limitless extent of wickedness he will go for the love of gain.” Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853)

The Jewish people in its history has experienced both slavery and freedom. Each year at Passover, Jews everywhere recount the story of the Exodus and our ancestors’ journey from bondage to redemption as a reminder to uphold the right of every individual to be free. Maimonides, one of the greatest rabbinic voices of our tradition, spoke on the importance of helping and freeing those enslaved and stated that there is no greater mitzvah than redeeming the captives.

Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ) from its inception has advocated for basic human rights and, in particular, the rights and well-being of women and girls. In 1996, WRJ called on its affiliates to urge the US Immigration and Naturalization Service to grant asylum to girls and women fleeing the threat of female genital mutilation (*Female Genital Mutilation, 1996 WRJ Board Statement*). In 2000, WRJ’s Executive Committee expressed “concern about the plight of women and children victimized by sexual trafficking, women under the Taliban and other governments that repress women, and abused women seeking asylum in the United States.” *Rights of Women and Girl Children Worldwide, 2000 WRJ Executive Committee Statement*. Sadly, the problem of human trafficking worldwide persists.

This year, the United States Congress will consider a 2017 reauthorization of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act. This reauthorization, together with other legislation, will establish American priorities and allocate funds in the fight against human trafficking for the next three to five years. The United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and its reauthorizations in 2003, 2005, and 2008 (collectively the TVPA) define human trafficking as including both forced labor and sex trafficking induced by or obtained through the use of “force, fraud, or coercion” (<https://www.state.gov/j/tip/laws/61124.htm>). On February 23, 2017, President Donald J. Trump called human trafficking an "epidemic" and vowed to combat it with the "full force and weight" of the United States government (<http://wtop.com/health/2017/02/trump-vows-to-fight-epidemic-of-human-trafficking/>).

The Government of Canada has called human trafficking “one of the most heinous crimes imaginable” (<https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/ntnl-ctn-pln-cmbt/ntnl-ctn->

[pln-cmbt-eng.pdf](#) and “intolerable in Canadian society” (https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-justice/news/2017/02/combating_humantraffickingandsupportingvictims.html). Six offenses in the Canadian Criminal Code specifically address human trafficking and specific offences in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act target cross-border trafficking (<http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/tp/legis-loi.html>).

On February 9th, 2017, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada introduced Bill [C-38, An Act to amend the Criminal Code \(exploitation and trafficking in persons\)](#) to minimize the need for human trafficking victims to appear in court, simplify the process for seizing property of convicted human traffickers and “help strengthen Canada’s criminal law response to trafficking in persons in a manner that is consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms” (https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-justice/news/2017/02/combating_humantraffickingandsupportingvictims.html). However, some say that this Bill does not go far enough in that it does not include mandatory consecutive sentencing (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/human-trafficking-law-liberal-1.3974776>).

Human trafficking is a modern form of slavery. According to the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO), approximately 21 million people worldwide are victims of human trafficking, 11.4 million of whom are women and girls. One and a half million human trafficking victims are in the Developed Economies (United States, Canada, Greenland, Australia and New Zealand) and the European Union. Four and a half million people worldwide are victims of forced sexual exploitation while the remainder are victims of forced labor exploitation, such as agriculture, construction, domestic work or manufacturing. Children aged 17 years and younger represent 26% of the total (or 5.5 million child victims). Fifty percent of these children are sold for sexual purposes (including forced marriages) with the other 50% sold for slave labor (including child soldiers) or organ removal. Only one in ten is rescued (<http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>). The exploitation of children for prostitution, slavery, or organ removal is considered criminal among all United Nations member states.

More than 150 billion dollars in illegal profits are generated annually through human trafficking (<http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>). This exceeds the GDP of many countries or territories around the world. Human trafficking ranks as the third most profitable crime after the selling of drugs and arms. (<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48271-.WKueJhIrLu5>).

Products, including pet food and candy, are sold for profit by companies which manufacture or import goods manufactured using convict labor, forced labor, or indentured labor (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-02-11/slavery-loophole-is-closed-by-u-s-senate-after-85-years>).

Human trafficking in North America manifests in many forms: traffickers operate agencies offering a way out of poverty with the intention of exploiting women and children; crew chiefs drive vans around the United States with a “mag team” (exploited young adults selling magazine subscriptions door to door); pimps prey on young runaways; traffickers procure domestic slave help from the Caribbean. In every case, physical and psychological violence are a large part of these victims’ lives. Traffickers often transport their victims from their home communities to unfamiliar destinations, including foreign countries (<https://www.state.gov/j/tip/laws/61124.htm>).

The need to address the socio-economic root causes of this hugely profitable illegal practice is urgent. Comprehensive measures are required to involve governments, workers, employers and other stakeholders in working together to end human trafficking. Human trafficking is bad for its victims, as well as for legitimate business and development. It is bad for civil society and it is morally repugnant to those who care about basic human rights. The ending of this practice should be a matter of highest priority.

We, the Board of Directors of Women of Reform Judaism, therefore:

1. Call on the United States Congress and Administration to work to combat human trafficking and reauthorize the 2017 Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act.
2. Call upon the Canadian Parliament to enact a bill that will minimize the need for human trafficking victims to appear in court, simplify the process for seizing property of convicted human traffickers, and establish strict criminal penalties for human trafficking that are consistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
3. Call on governments world-wide to strengthen laws and policies to combat human trafficking.
4. Call on our members to advocate for local, state, provincial, or national legislation to strengthen laws and policies to combat human trafficking.
5. Call on our members to urge their elected officials to institute social protection measures, including education and skills training, to mitigate social and economic vulnerabilities that are associated with human trafficking.
6. Urge our members to create awareness campaigns and participate in coalitions and activities that seek to put an end to human trafficking and to educate themselves on the issue of human trafficking by going to sites such as the Religious Action Center (<http://www.rac.org/human-trafficking>).
7. Urge our members to not purchase products from companies that manufacture or import goods manufactured using convict labor, forced labor, or indentured labor.