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PERSPECTIVE

Cambodia and California's awful traffic

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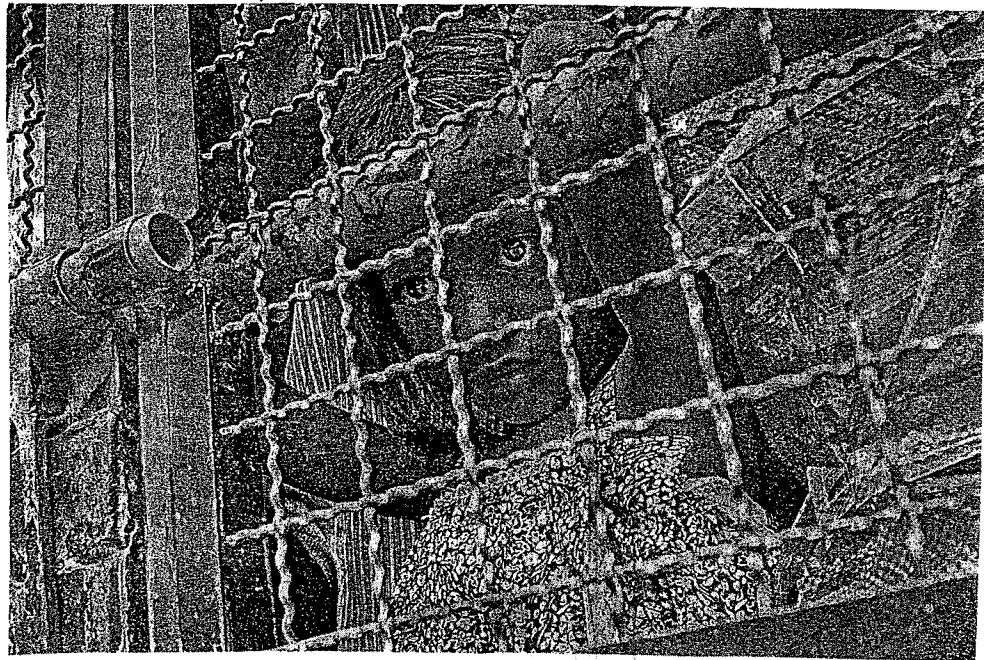
One cannot really have a meaningful discussion of the topic of human trafficking and slave trade in Cambodia without understanding that much of its genesis arises as a direct result of the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. Between 1975 and 1979, the Khmer Rouge, under leadership of communist-backed Pol Pot, sought to return Cambodian society back to its agrarian roots. Within 48 hours of Pol Pot's rise to power in 1975, his army emptied 2 million people out of the capital and summarily executed nearly the entirety of Cambodia's middle and educated class, as well as its Buddhist monk population.

Cultural Commentary

What makes the Cambodian genocide and resulting aftermath different from others is two-fold: the concept of traditional family centrality no longer remained, and the basis of its moral compass was obliterated. In the Cambodian genocide, the camps separated the children, men and women, and often, the circumstances forced family members to turn on one another. There were many reported cases where victims tortured and killed their own families in order to survive their own potential torture and execution. Some of those children are parents today. While the Buddhist religion provided an excellent moral compass base, this too was lost during the genocide as the monks' population was likewise decimated.

It is not uncommon in Cambodia to hear of children as young as seven or eight being sold to brothels (often operating with the complicity of the police or military), held captive for years, and repeatedly raped. While it would be convenient to blame this ability to sell one's young as purely a business dealing by one desperately in need of money, that assumption would be only a partial explanation. The issue gets cloudy because there is overwhelming poverty all over Cambodia. However, it is not the poverty per se which causes the sale of young children into prostitution and slavery, but the fact that the sellers are, by and large, uneducated, and do not possess the moral compass that was present in Cambodia prior to the genocide.

There is also an enormous pedophile business in Cambodia. Just this past week at a popular watering hole and restaurant, only a few feet from where I was eating dinner, the culmination of a five-month sting operation took place. Cambodian



Migrant workers from Cambodia have fled Thailand amid rumors of crackdown on migrant employment to prevent illegal workers, forced labor and human trafficking, May 20, 2014, Piopet, Cambodia. Associated Press

authorities, along with an undercover Australian federal police officer, arrested a former monk who was operating an "underprivileged school," and fraudulent nongovernmental organization, through which he solicited donations from well-meaning Western benefactors. In reality, he was operating a portal for pedophiles and acted as a supplier.

The stories and the evidence of human trafficking in Cambodia are, at once, pervasive and heart breaking in magnitude and effect. Cambodia is inflicted by both internal and cross-border trafficking; it is a country of origin, transit and destination. Some trafficking networks in Cambodia are small like the former monk's, and others are large and highly organized, though they are certainly becoming more clandestine than in the past. Besides young adult women, there is also a significant market for the sale of young virgins. In addition to Cambodian men who are often the demand source for childhood prostitution, other Asians, Americans and Europeans come to Cambodia for the child sex tourism.

But it is not just women, virgins and young children who are trafficked, but men as well. Typically, men are subjected to forced labor on Thai fishing boats operating

in international waters. Those Cambodian men who have escaped have turned up in nearby Malaysia and Indonesia, and as far away as Fiji, Mauritius, Senegal and South Africa.

About five miles from the capital of Phnom Penh is the village of Svay Pak, a known center for childhood prostitution. As recently as 2005, nearly 100 percent of the children in Svay Pak between the ages of eight and 12 were trafficked. According to an NGO that provides services in the village, the number today is closer to 70 percent. While that is, statistically speaking, a significant improvement, 70 percent is still an astronomical figure.

For the past 14 years, the U.S. Department of State has prepared an annual country-by-country Trafficking in Person's Report, which assesses how each country in the world is dealing with its trafficking and slave trade. The report is the U.S. government's principal diplomatic tool to engage foreign governments on human trafficking. It is also, according to the State Department, the world's most comprehensive resource of governmental anti-human trafficking efforts. And it reflects the U.S. government's efforts towards global leadership on this key human rights and law

enforcement issue. The report is used by NGOs, international organizations and foreign governments to combat the problem.

The 2014 report placed the Cambodian government on its "Tier 2 Watch List," as it did not fully comply with the Trafficking Victims Protective Act of 2000's minimum standards, though Cambodia made efforts to do so. Specifically, the Cambodian government did not make progress in holding offenders accountable. Indeed, in November 2013, the Supreme Court of Cambodia held an unannounced, closed-door hearing and acquitted the former head of the Phnom Penh police's anti-human trafficking and juvenile protection department. Incredibly, that police official had originally been convicted in absentia in 2011 for human trafficking and related offenses. As a result of this case and others of insidious corruption, there exists a climate of impunity for offenders and a wholesale denial of justice for the victims.

The lowest possible ranking, Tier 3, is, from a foreign relations standpoint, a significant gut punch, which brings with it the potential for U.S. sanctions. By way of contrast, a Tier 1 ranking does not signify an absence of human trafficking. Instead, a Tier 1 ranking is assigned

to those countries which acknowledge its trafficking and slave trade, and make "appreciable progress" in its efforts to fight them.

Human trafficking is, of course, not only a Cambodian problem. Indeed, the U.S. has a very significant human trafficking problem as well.

The U.S. Department of State has, for the past four years, included the U.S. in its annual report. The 2014 report ranks the U.S. as a Tier 1 nation and estimates that over 17,000 men, women and children are brought into the U.S. annually for trafficking. However, the problem in the U.S. is not only one of importing people into the U.S. for purposes of trafficking and the slave trade. Unfortunately, the U.S. is in the unenviable position of possessing an enormous home-grown trafficking problem as well.

Human trafficking exists all over the U.S., but according to the State Department's 2011 report, the highest concentrations are in Texas, New York, Oklahoma and California. California is an epicenter for both domestic and international human trafficking due to its large population, large economy, porous borders, extensive ports and large metropolitan regions. In addition, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported in 2009 that California

harbors three of the FBI's 13 highest sex trafficking areas in the U.S. Those three areas are Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Diego.

The 2014 report reflects that during fiscal year 2013, the Department of Justice convicted a total of 174 traffickers in cases involving forced labor, and sex trafficking of adults and children, compared to 138 such convictions in fiscal year 2012. State, not federal, laws form the basis of the majority of criminal actions. All states and U.S. territories have enacted anti-trafficking criminal statutes and all states and the District of Columbia prohibit childhood prostitution under local laws that predate the Trafficking Victims Protective Act. However, in some cases, trafficked victims, including those under 18, continue to be treated as criminal offenders.

One of the biggest problems we face in the U.S., like many countries, is that we don't have accurate numbers. Given the resources that we have in the U.S., relative to some other governments, our efforts at home should increase exponentially.

The global industry of human trafficking generates an utterly staggering \$150 billion in *annual* profits and does so by the exploitation of those most vulnerable in society. To put this in perspective, in 2013, IBM reported \$99 billion in worldwide revenue and Microsoft, \$21 billion for the same period.

As a world leader, and consistently vocal proponent of human rights, if we are to look in the collective American mirror without remorse or regret, we should put more money where our mouths are, so that we can stop this morally offensive industry at home as well.

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