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Tens of thousands rescued from modern-day slavery; millions more remain in bondage: report

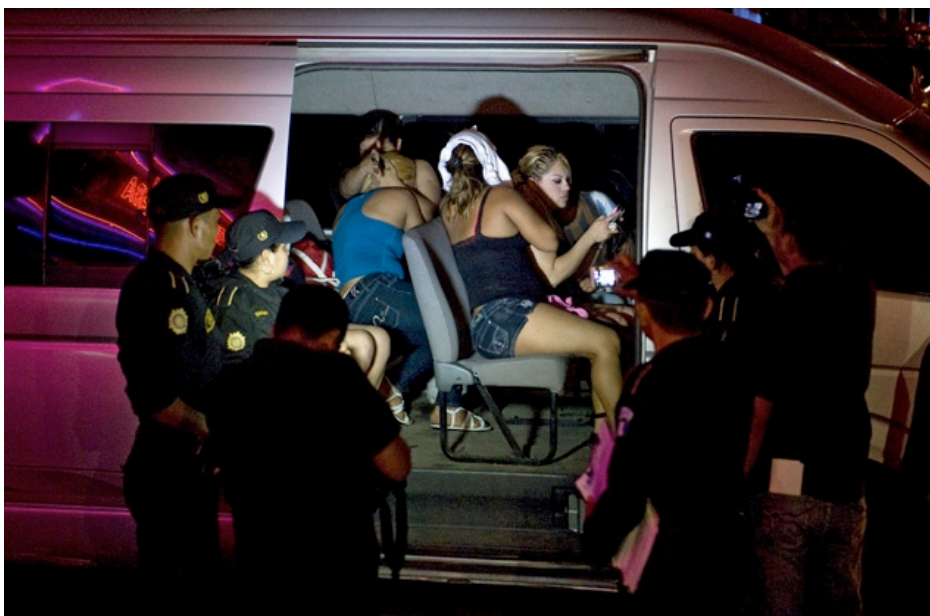
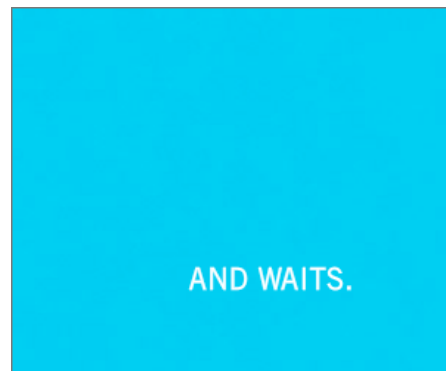
More than 42,000 people were freed from slavery last year. Millions more are still enslaved, working as everything from prostitutes to farm laborers, a new report says.

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BY MEENA HART DUERSON / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Wednesday, June 20, 2012, 10:17 AM

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JOHAN ORDONEZ/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Prostitutes, like these women shown being arrested in Guatemala City, are often the victims of human trafficking, a new report shows. (JOHAN ORDONEZ/AFP/Getty Images)

More than 42,000 people were found living in conditions of slavery around the world in 2011, but 20.9 million are still enslaved, according to a new report from the U.S. State Department.

The "Trafficking in Persons Report," released in June, is based on data provided by governments around the world. The U.S. requires it as proof that they are working to combat slavery.

Anecdotes woven throughout the report offer a stark picture of the

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lives of millions of people stuck in modern-day slavery, forced into back-breaking labor and sexual exploitation.

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Prostitutes come out of a tunnel where they remained hidden during an operation against human trafficking at the 'Super Frontera' bar, April 21, in Guatemala City. (JOHAN ORDONEZ/AFP/Getty Images)

One girl, 13-year-old Maria Elena was brought across the border from Mexico to the U.S. with the promise that she would be able to earn 10 times as much money as she could at home. Instead, she was gang-raped and forced into prostitution, made to "have sex with up to 30 men a day." When she finally escaped, she was arrested along with her captors.

Her situation is not unusual for human trafficking victims, who "have typically been tricked, lied to, threatened, assaulted, raped or confined," according to the report. Fifty-five percent of slaves today are estimated to be women and girls.

Uta, a 7-year-old from Romania, was sent to the U.K. by her family to work as a domestic servant in an attempt to give her a life away from poverty. Instead, she was beaten and verbally abused by the family she went to work for. The same family also raped another man they had recruited.

By the time Uta was able to escape and get help from the police, she was "dressed in filthy clothes, had scabs covering her head, and her teeth were so rotten they had to be removed."

The couple was sentenced to 14 years in prison.

In some situations, even police intervention hasn't been enough to save these victims.

One Nepalese woman, whose story is included in the report, followed a man on the promise of a job, but ended up being sold into sex slavery at an Indian brothel "where she was forced to have sex with at least 35 men each day" and beaten "with an iron pole" if she tried to refuse. When the police raided the brothel, they arrested the girls working there, and the woman was forced to serve jail time - before she was ultimately sent back to the brothel. She was eventually able to escape and now lives in a shelter.

People with disabilities are among those "most at risk of being trafficked," according to the report. A recent survey found that "women and girls with disabilities were assumed to be virgins and thus targeted for forced

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sex, including by HIV positive individuals who believed that having sex with a virgin would cure them."

The scope of human trafficking is so large, the report found, that it costs \$20 billion per year in money and benefits withheld from the victims.

The report is prefaced with a letter from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who talked about her experience meeting trafficking victims in Kolkata, India, and noted that 2012 marks the 150th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's emancipation proclamation.

"A century and a half after the promise of freedom was fought and won in the United States, freedom remains elusive for millions," she wrote.

"We know that this struggle will not truly be won until all those who toil in modern slavery, like those girls in Kolkata, are free to realize their God-given potential."

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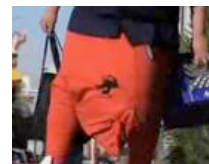
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