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## Opinion: Will the U.S. stand up against child trafficking?

As a staff representative with World Vision in Oregon, I'm constantly surrounded with information about the plight of children around the world.

Of the many injustices children face, human trafficking has to be one that rips at my core and makes me question why it has to exist.

It's hard for me to imagine crossing such a border in search of a better life ... but that's exactly what Ibic, a young Burmese boy living in Thailand's Mae Sot district did. A stranger came to the house and invited Ibic to sell roti (a flat Indian bread made from flour).

Lured by false promises of a job paying a several hundred Baht a day, he agreed to go work in Bangkok where he was told he would earn enough money for his mother to buy food and provide for the family.

Ibic explained how he left Mae Sot district for the first time and boarded a bus with an agent. He was brought to a house in Fang district, Chiang Mai, and the agent left him. The owner of the house told him he must sell roti in order to pay off his debts and forced him to sell roti with other young boys who had also been tricked. If he sold enough he would get to eat food and if not,

he was beaten.

After months of failed escape attempts, Ibic was finally able to succeed. With help from local ministries and World Vision, he was able to move into a protection and occupational development center before being brought back to his home in Mae Sot district.

About 200 million children are exploited every day as child laborers and sex workers. Most are forced to work in hazardous conditions, such as mines, with agricultural chemicals and pesticides, or dangerous machinery. At least 2 million are actually trafficked specifically for purposes of child labor or sexual exploitation. They are treated as mere commodities to be used and cast aside. Much of the world is ignorant of or simply ignores their plight.

Child trafficking is just one in a long list of human tragedies that World Vision is working hard to shine the light of truth on and make unacceptable.

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There are "tipping points" in history that are critical to the ultimate success of the endeavor. We are facing a tipping point right now in the battle to protect children from human trafficking - renewal of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA).

The TVPA is the largest piece of human-rights legislation in U.S. history. It created the first comprehensive federal law to address human trafficking and modern-day slavery, targeting both the domestic and international dimensions of this heinous crime. The law has a three-pronged approach:

- Prevent vulnerability;
- Protect survivors;
- Prosecute human traffickers.

Because the methods employed by human traffickers are constantly evolving, the TVPA must be renewed every few years. The current legislation expires on September 30, just 6 days from now. The TVPA Reauthorization Act of 2011 will strengthen enforcement of the law by encouraging government and business partnerships, providing technical assistance abroad to prevent recruitment, establishing child protection compacts between the U.S. and other countries, strengthening child exploitation laws against U.S. citizens living abroad, and protecting possible witnesses.

We know this bill works; we have seen the results first-hand in our anti-trafficking work around the globe. Under the original law passed in 2000 the number of human

trafficking cases charged by the U.S. Attorney's office grew from three to 52 in the past decade. You can help tip the scales and protect vulnerable children around the world by encouraging your elected officials to renew the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. We must not allow any gaps in the fight to stop human trafficking.

You can make a difference today by calling your member of Congress and voicing your support for reauthorization of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act.

*Alan Shiffer, works in Portland with World Vision, the international Christian humanitarian organization.*

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