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# Inquiry launched into slavery in the UK

Human trafficking figures reveal practices thought to have been abolished 200 years ago

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**Mark Townsend**

The Observer, Sunday 12 June 2011

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'Charity' from Africa, a 21st-century victim of human trafficking. Photograph: Graham Turner for the Guardian

A major inquiry into human trafficking will be launched this week amid claims that slavery remains as much of a problem in modern Britain as when it was abolished more than 200 years ago.

The Centre for Social Justice is to announce a 15-month investigation into the issue following concerns over a lack of political will, policing resources, low prosecution rates and flaws within the government system for identifying trafficked victims.

The inquiry aims to put forward a series of recommendations on how the UK could embrace a more effective strategy to tackle modern slavery.

The work and pensions secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, speaking in his capacity as chairman of the cabinet's social justice committee, will articulate the importance of tackling what remains one of the country's least understood crimes.

Among the investigation's aims will be to establish the scale of human trafficking and slavery in Britain. Between April 2009 and March last year, 706 potential victims of slavery were formally identified in the UK. Up to 18,000 women and children are also believed to have been trafficked into the UK and forced to work as prostitutes.

Gavin Poole, executive director of the CSJ, said: "Many people think slavery was abolished on the high seas by the Royal Navy 200 years ago. It wasn't. It is just as much of a problem today."

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## Comments in chronological order (Total 11 comments)

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[joanwalters](#)

12 June 2011 8:45AM

The sooner our UK borders are tightly sealed the better. We have been sold the lie, via a compliant media, that immigration, enforced diversity and globalisation are all "enrichment" without a mention of the potential drawbacks. Crime, "racism", drugs, prostitution and now, slavery.

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[NameTaken](#)

12 June 2011 9:04AM

The introduction of a living wage will help many British slaves..

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[sarahcl](#)

12 June 2011 10:13AM

Before all the sex industry apologists turn up to say that trafficking into prostitution is a myth I would like to thank the Observer for continuing to cover this issue.

This review looks very good, especially the emphasis on "concerns over a lack of political will, policing resources, low prosecution rates and flaws within the government system for identifying trafficked victims," as I believe the biggest problems with past attempts to 'crack down' hasn't been a lack of victims, but a lack of joined-up political thinking, which would rather treat trafficking victims as illegal immigrants; a lack of police competence (going into brothels to ask women who fear for their lives

whether or not they've been trafficked probably isn't the most effective approach); and the technical/legal definition of trafficking itself which makes it a very difficult crime to prove, especially when you have witnesses who may fear violent retribution against themselves or their families.

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baytree

12 June 2011 2:13PM

The government and the police are fully aware imported slavery and prostitution has been increasing alarmingly for two decades yet make it punishable for the victims as being very likely illegals, who do they expect to come forward and give them information if they are going to be banged up for it, most perpetrators of both crimes are foreign nationals who flout the law and do it openly, the victims are scared to go either way they are between a rock and a hard place, tell the victims they will be treated with respect and taken care of, gather the evidence they are what they say and then make sure the perpetrators are severely punished with very heavy fines and or jail after which they get deported.

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Hoppy3

13 June 2011 2:07PM

I am really pleased to hear that an enquiry is being launched into this matter.

Like @saracl, I think it is a good thing that the investigation will look at, 'a lack of political will, policing resources, low prosecution rates and flaws within the government system for identifying trafficked victims'.

Trafficked people forced into slavery are all too common worldwide, and we in the UK should be ashamed of our ignorance to the matter, particularly within our own country. Worldwide, trafficking affects millions of lives. But the stories rarely reach the papers because they don't grab readers as much as individual events such as wars and genocides.

Trafficked people are frequently tortured into acceptance of the fate of slavery. Their more outspoken contemporaries are often brutally tortured or murdered and used as examples to ensure compliance within a group of enslaved people. Women and children are often chosen from areas and cultures where quiet obedience is nurtured and education is poor, so they are often more likely to feel they have no way out. Trafficked people and their families are often threatened by their traffickers. Imagine being found by the Police but feeling unable to explain your situation for fear of endangering the lives of your friends and family. All too often, trafficked people within the UK are labelled as voluntary prostitutes and illegal immigrants. Too little effort is taken to investigate their realities. If you, as a trafficked person, were released and

managed to return to your family, your trafficker would probably also know where to find you, because trafficked people are often taken from their homes or their local area. You might be forced to return, or brutally punished for your 'misdemeanour'. I believe that there needs to be a comprehensive overview of the approach to this problem within the UK and worldwide. I do hope that the enquiry forms an appropriate startpoint to tackle the issue.

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[Tulkinghorn](#)

13 June 2011 5:10PM

I love the assumption that this is all about the sex industry.

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[SoyAmado](#)

13 June 2011 5:40PM

It is a sad commentary on the heart of man when the human soul is worth nothing more than what price it brings! This crime is becoming very violent and worldwide. We lived not far from where a semi truck used for hauling cattle was abandoned in the desert, its occupants fell out, dehydrated, emaciated and near death...men women and children all hoping for a new life in the USA but were, in actuality, bound for the trafficking trade: slave labor, gang 'mules' to run the drugs, sex trade and labor camps. But there is hope for the victims:<http://stephaniesprayercorner.blogspot.com/>

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[Hoppy3](#)

13 June 2011 6:44PM

@Tulkinghorn

Are you not the one to be making assumptions? Where exactly is the assumption that 'this is all about the sex industry'?

The article states that...

"Between April 2009 and March last year, 706 potential victims of slavery were formally identified in the UK. Up to 18,000 women and children are also believed to have been trafficked into the UK and forced to work as prostitutes."

This suggests that the sex industry plays a very large role. It does not suggest that the sex industry is the only 'industry' to use trafficked people.

However, if you were to read about the problem of human trafficking you would find

that sex slavery is one of the main targets of traffickers. You might also find that the sex industry hides trafficked people very effectively due to its placement on the periphery of society. Not to suggest that this is the only area where people are enslaved and hidden out of view.

Human trafficking is a very complicated issue and surely the purpose of the enquiry is to understand it better; this is no time to make assumptions.

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[Gemmellibean](#)

28 June 2011 12:51PM

Up to 18,000 women and children are also believed to have been trafficked into the UK and forced to work as prostitutes.

I would just like to point out the lazy media recycling of dubious statistics in this article...Particularly deplorable since the Guardian published an article on this very issue, debunking these very figures, 2 years ago. Read it for yourself:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/oct/20/trafficking-numbers-women-exaggerated?INTCMP=SRCH>

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[jillir](#)

4 July 2011 8:35AM

I maintain that 'trafficked' people (for the sex trade or domestic slavery) should not be given the right to remain in the UK. They are still illegal immigrants, whether they were kidnapped and brought here or they chose to come in illegally, and ended up as slaves.

Likewise, the people who do it should be deported, whether they are illegals, have residential status or have become UK citizens. Here we come up against the EU Human Rights Act which is affecting the sovereignty of the UK.

But if this situation is not smashed immediately, it will never go away, and Britain will continue to slide down into third world status.

How women are treated in some countries makes me sick and always has done. We have only just gained some sort of equality in the western world, and now this is imported. So how long will it take the government to act? Do we have to fight for women all over again?

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[HeyJoe1](#)

9 July 2011 5:56AM

People need to understand that the Asylum Seeker system is being used and abused to aid the modern day slave traders, through debt servitude and other devious methods. The Asylum Seeker system needs to be completely changed to more a resettlement type system.

The UK should look to shut down most methods by which people can seek asylum in the UK and only limit it to people in the political process only not others. Other people who are found to be refugees should be removed from the UK and placed in the safest refugee camp closest to the conflict. In all cases Asylum seekers should be detained in the UK until their cases are processed. Under no circumstance should they be realised into the community as the UK has found this is a one way street to an amnesty, it makes claims very hard to asses and actually is just an Open Borders policy.

Then the UK should set up a permanent resettlement of about 5,000 Asylum seekers per year from refugee camps around the world and instead of dumping them on the UK society (as you do currently with Asylum Seekers) actually give them the benefits required, language course, training etc, etc to make something of themselves in the UK. People must realise that the costs associated with the current Asylum System is just one of the many things that is killing the UK. Over the las t two decades, in every western democracy the cost of the current Asylum System has become prohibitively expensive and everyone knows in a Western Democracy there is nothing more permanent than a person offered temporary protection as an asylum seeker.

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