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Helping the Victims of Cambodian Child Sex Trafficking Through American Support and Legislation

Torn from their families
Mothers go hungry
To feed their children
But children go hungry
There's so many big men
They're out making millions
When poverty's profits
Just blame the children

-excerpt from If There's A God in Heaven by Elton John

Human rights. A concept that gets thrown around plenty in the world we live in today. But what exactly are human rights? We hear them mentioned so much that we may get confused as to what an actual human right is. The United Nations lays out 30 articles describing what they believe to be human rights in their *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which consists of 30 articles and a preamble (Universal Declaration of Human Rights). As citizens of the United States, we don't realize just how lucky we are. Laws and regulations have been made to protect us against violations of our rights. In other countries however, that may not be the case. In some countries, something as simple as a child labor law may not exist. This is especially prominent in the Asian country of Cambodia. With an ever changing political climate, Cambodia is in a constant state of change. With little access to clean water and sanitation, Cambodia also faces many health issues within their communities. However, one of the most neglected problems is the abuse and mistreatment of children. With multiple child trafficking rings, Cambodia has a very far way to come before they achieve full human rights to all the citizens. This issue may not be the root of all human rights issues in Cambodia, but dealing with them would definitely help to improve the quality of life for children. Throughout this essay, I will talk about different parts of this issue and how we can work to stop it altogether.

Cambodia is a coastal country in the Southeastern portion of Asia. It shares borders with 3 countries: Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. Unfortunately, the country has one of the lowest life expectancies of any country in the world. With the exception of Laos by about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a year, Cambodia also has the lowest life expectancy in all of Southeast Asia. The country also has a very low Current Health Expenditure, or CHE. CHE refers to the percentage of money that is designated to health in a certain country in regards to their own economy. Compared to other countries in the world, Cambodia has a relatively low percentage of 6%. This is compared to other numbers that may be in the lower teens or even the United States, which boasts a 16.9% (*Central Intelligence Agency*).

There are a little over 17 million citizens in the country of Cambodia. Just under $\frac{1}{3}$ (30.18%) of the citizens of Cambodia are children aged 0-14 years of age. Making up the second largest age group in the

country, these children are essential to the future of Cambodia. With that being said, oftentimes they are not protected the way they should be. Within that age group, just under 50% are female. Fortunately for the country, compared to other countries within Southeast Asia, Cambodia has a relatively low child and infant mortality rate (*Central Intelligence Agency*).

In 1967, disaster struck within Cambodia. The Communist Party of Kampuchea, also known as the Khmer Rouge, attacked the government of Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge was aided by Northern Vietnam while the government of Cambodia was supported by Southern Vietnam and the United States. After an eight year long civil war, the Khmer Rouge came to win. This specific war was actually considered to be a key asset to the Vietnam War, which was also going on at this time. The victory of the Khmer Rouge led to the Cambodian Genocide, in which we now know as “The Killing Fields.” This specific genocide is recognized as one of the deadliest in history. During the genocide, thousands of Cambodians were slaughtered and children were forced to work for the Khmer Rouge with no compensation (Cambodian Civil War).

In the book, *Never Fall Down*, author Patricia McCormick tells the story of a young boy named Arn. Arn was a young boy in Cambodia who was captured by the Khmer Rouge and forced to work for them in the rice fields before eventually playing in a Rouge Band. The book uses direct quotes from Arn himself. When Arn is able to get to America, he states the following, “All the time you fighting, you think only of how to survive. All the time you survive, you wonder why you don’t die. But now my life can be something different. Now, in America, I don’t have to fight. I don’t have to survive. I can chose a new thing: to live.” Arn has now continued his passion for music and is also a human rights and music activist. He has gone on to give multiple inspirational speeches on such platforms as TEDx and his story will never be forgotten (McCormick, Patrica and Arn Chorn-Pond).

However, the child labor during the genocide led to another issue among the children that would become very noticable later in time, especially amongst the young women.

Human Trafficking is a serious issue in our world today. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime goes into detail to what they describe Human Trafficking as.

Human Trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit. Men, women and children of all ages and from all backgrounds can become victims of this crime, which occurs in every region of the world. The traffickers often use violence or fraudulent employment agencies and fake promises of education and job opportunities to trick and coerce their victims. (Human Trafficking)

Svay Pak, Cambodia. A small destitute village located in Southern Cambodia right outside the district of Phnom Penh, the capital of the country. This specific village is home to one of the largest areas of child sex trafficking within Southeast Asia. Young girls from the age of six to sixteen are sold by their parents to go to Svay Pak. All of this is a result of the “virginity sale.” When a family is in dire need of money, a mother may sell her own daughter into prostitution for profit. If a girl has not experienced sex, either willing or unwilling before in her life, she is taken to the doctor and given a “certificate of virginity,” which signifies a higher worth of the girl. In their minds it is completely justified, but some men in this

area of the world believe that sleeping with a virgin will cure any disease they may have, such as AIDs (Global Center for Pedophiles).

In a recent story published by CNN, multiple young girls are interviewed about their own personal experiences from within a sex trafficking ring in Cambodia. Kieu was a young girl living in the Svay Pak area with her mother. She tells reporters the story of how her mother asked her to take a job without knowing what it entailed. Knowing her family was low on funds, she accepted. She was then taken to a hospital and given a “certificate of virginity” before being delivered to a hotel and being raped by a man for two days straight. At the time of this incident, Kieu was only twelve years old (Global Center for Pedophiles).

Along with the general sale of the girls to specific men, some women will also force their daughters into a brothel. Men from all around the country and surrounding countries such as Vietnam will come to just have sex with these girls. An undercover police officer attained an email from a Singaporean man by the name of Chan Chung Hong who was planning to visit one of these brothels. The email attained is extremely sickening in which Chung Hong explains his exact intentions. It reads, “You can go Cambodia, Phnom Penh. The place is called Svay Pak. There are many there you can try. Age around 6 to 16. Depending on what u want to do. I find 12 to 14 year olds the best as they are freshest and is becoming a grown up girl soon. Innocent too. :) and very curious about sex.” When eventually captured, Chan Chun Hong is charged with 131 counts of sexual misconduct. He is convicted of a dozen crimes and is sentenced to 56 months in prison. This is just one example of the horrible men exploiting young children in Cambodia (Brewster, Donald J.).

While there are no longer any child brothels in Svay Pak, the sale of these girls is still very prevalent. There may not be any sale of these girls in broad daylight anymore, many are still sexually exploited on the very streets of Cambodia. Child pedophiles are placed just about anywhere to be found on the streets where they are offered a young girl for a large sum of money. To the clients and the pedophiles, these girls are nothing more than “commodities” (Brewster, Donald J.).

Agape International Missions, or AIM, is a non-profit organization whose mission is to end sex trafficking in the world, especially in Svay Pak, Cambodia. The organization was started by Donald Brewster, who is a former pastor from California. Since starting their operation in Cambodia in 2006, AIM has helped numerous girls who have been victims of the child sex trade in Cambodia (Global Center for Pedophiles).

When looking at solving a problem, it is often wise to see how similar problems are being addressed in other areas of the world. Take the African country of Nigeria. Sex trafficking and human slavery are both very serious problems in the world that we live in today. Nigeria is a country that seems to echo this statement. The population of Nigeria is only about $\frac{2}{3}$ that of the population of the United States. However, for every one person that is identified to be living in modern slavery in the United States, there are about 6 Nigerians (Government Response). Most of this is relevant to the country’s GDP per capita. In the United States, the average GDP per capita is about \$62,350. This puts it at the 15th highest according to the World Factbook. Nigeria on the other hand is ranked at 176 with a GDP per capita of \$5,136, which comes out to only about 8.2% of that of the United States (Central Intelligence Agency). When the GDP per capita of a country gets this low, you begin to see the side effects such as poverty, food insecurity, and many others. Like shown in the country of Cambodia, Nigeria tends to have a higher

rate of sex trafficking and/or human slavery because of their GDP per Capita. This is once again due to the fact that people are willing to exploit other humans, sometimes even their own family, if it means they might get to add even a single dime to their pocket.

With all of this being said about Nigeria, they have started to implement a solution. In recent years, the government of Nigeria has started to more seriously address these issues. As identified by the Global Slavery Index, the Nigerian government has implemented these five milestones to help mitigate the problems of slavery.

1. Survivors of slavery are identified and supported to exit and remain out of modern slavery
2. Criminal justice mechanisms function effectively to prevent modern slavery
3. Coordination occurs at the national and regional level, and governments are held to account for their response
4. Risk factors, such as attitudes, social systems, and institutions that enable modern slavery are addressed
5. Government and business stop sourcing goods and services produced by forced labour

By enacting these five steps within the country, the government of Nigeria has greatly reduced the amount of citizens that are involved within modern slavery. They have done so much to improve the well-being of the country in this way that the Global Slavery Index now ranks their Government Response Rating at a B (Government Response). It may not be perfect, but it is definitely an improvement that other countries such as Cambodia can use as a model for their own solutions.

More funding needs to go towards organizations such as AIM. In the past, we have seen just how important it is to help those in need. Millions of children are trafficked in the world each year and if we don't do something about it, it's only going to get worse. In recent years there has been multiple steps to help end sex trafficking in places even in the United States.

Under President Donald Trump in 2018, FOSTA-SESTA is a group of two laws passed with the goal to help end sex trafficking in the United States. In simple terms, the legislation is designed to help those Americans who may have been impacted by sex trafficking in the digital age. It also helps to reduce the amount of total trafficking in the states today. However, with the passing of the law came a lot of ruckus. Many voluntary sex workers have come forward and said that the new law threatens their opportunities for work. FOSTA-SESTA was not meant to harm those who use sex as voluntary work, only to help those who have been trafficked involuntarily (Tung).

As citizens of the United States, we are fortunate to be given access to the law in our country. With that being said, we have the opportunity to speak with the people who help to make those very laws, our congressmen. We have seen in the past how the United States has offered help to other countries, but we don't realize how much of an impact we can have on that. By alerting our representatives of the many issues that are happening in the world, we can help to better it as a whole. Whether this be sending money to organizations such as AIM or even just implementing a new law into the U.S. about sex trafficking, we can better help to alert the world on what needs to be done to stop this global problem.

Sex trafficking is a huge problem in some parts of the world, but hope is not over. For the children in Cambodia being exploited for their bodies, true happiness may seem like a very distant reality. I believe that with the right methods and solutions, we will be able to help bring not only Cambodia's trafficked

children to their feet, but many other children who are deemed with this horror. We can not let the people who exploit these children get away with this for any longer.

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