

Defend their cause – slavery still lives on...

By Joy Butler

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the British Parliament's vote to ban the atrocious slave trade. The new film *Amazing Grace* makes a powerful impact to remind us of this tragic time. I stood beside the beautiful Lake Malawi in Africa recently and thought of the piles of bleached bones David Livingstone had seen there – bones of people who had died in chains on their way to the coast to be taken away from home. During 400 years of slavery approximately 11.5 million slaves were moved across the world.

Whether we call it forced labour, trafficking or sex slavery, over 27 million people around the world are still locked in some form of bondage. The majority are female. Slaves are cheaper today than they have ever been.

Consider the religious slaves in India and Nepal – little girls as young as five who are 'married' to a Hindu god or temple to bring a family favour. These girls are used until priests' tire of them and then sold to the highest bidder. Eventually the girls and any children conceived are turned out onto the streets to survive any way they can.

Thousands of girls in Africa are abused, frequently raped and beaten, forced to beg for food. Many are child soldiers, used, abused and cast aside. Thousands suffer the agonies of FGM (female genital mutilation).

Between 12 and 20 million people are trapped in debt bondage. They accept small loans and then submit to working in subhuman conditions to repay it. At least 15 million children are 'bonded' to payback family loans in India alone.

In Thailand, 100,000 women and young girls are prostituted. Many live in appalling conditions and are often drugged and denied basic human rights. Young girls are hurt, bleeding, pregnant or contract HIV/AIDS and go home ashamed and to die.

One 9 year old girl shares the plight of her 10 year old sister: "Every morning at seven she goes to work for the man and every night at nine she comes home. He treats her badly; he hits her if he thinks she is working slowly or if she talks to other children, he yells at her. He comes looking for her if she is sick and cannot go to work. I don't care about school or playing. I don't care about any of that. All I want is to bring my sister home from the man she works for. For \$10 I can bring her home – that is our only chance to get her back. We don't have \$10 ...we will never have \$10."

When she was a little girl, Channah was sold from her home in Cambodia across the border to a Thai begging syndicate for the equivalent of \$4.50. When found in Bangkok she was numb with pain, forced to beg, then robbed of the money she made. At only 11 she was no longer a child – she was a machine.

Trafficking – the illegal trade in human beings – is the top human rights issue of the 21st Century. In the UK alone, a government-sponsored report estimates that up to 1500 women and girls are annually trafficked into the country for exploitation. The

USA has an estimate of 300,000 women working as sex slaves. In Australia some estimates suggest 1000 alien women are being used as prostitutes at any one time. Most of them have their passports removed and some don't know where they are and have not heard of Australia.

My daughter is married and happy. Millions of my sisters around the world have relinquished their daughters to the despicable sex industry. Others didn't even realize what was happening when their daughters went away to financially support the family.

To bring an end to the sex industry is the aim of CATWA (Coalition Against Trafficking Women – Australia). It is the aim of Jesus Christ and His few faithful followers.

Speak up for the people who have no voice, for the rights of all the down-and-outers. Speak out for justice! Stand up for the poor and destitute. Proverbs 31:8,9

Jesus called them back. "Let the children alone. Don't get between them and me. These children are the kingdom's pride and joy". Luke 18:16

For updates and information on how you can speak up:

www.theamazingchange.com - continue the work of Wilberforce

www.catwa.com – support Australian women against prostitution

www.adra.or.th - Keep Girls Safe

www.antislavery.org – the oldest international human rights organization

www.childwise.net – report violations of children and women in the Pacific region

www.rahabministriesthailand.org – support ex prostitutes

www.unicef.org.au – become a global parent