

# Rotarian Action Group against Slavery

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*"It is up to each and every one of us to raise our voice against crimes that deprive countless victims of their liberty, dignity and human rights. We have to work together to realize the equal rights promised to all by the United Nations Charter" (Ban Ki-Moon)*



## Seattle tech companies caught up in sex trafficking sting

The tech industry has been shown to have a clear history of sexism and misogyny, but a recent [Newsweek](#) report highlights another problem.

employees of a whole host of Seattle-based tech companies engaging in the patronage of brothels and purchasing the services of trafficked sex workers.

other major tech companies like Boeing, Oracle and T-Mobile.

It was reported that the emails were sent from official company accounts as a way of proving to pimps that they did not come from law enforcement officials.

The weekly American magazine has obtained a cache of emails, dating between 2014 and 2016, which reveal details of The investigative report found 67 emails were sent from Microsoft, 63 emails from Amazon and countless numbers from

## Malaysian special court for human trafficking cases

Malaysia is establishing a special court to tackle the alarming increase in the number of human trafficking cases arising in the country. The initiative has been welcomed by anti-slavery activists and the initial sitting is expected to be in early May in the central state of Selangor.

foreign domestic workers and labourers from countries such as Indonesia, Bangladesh and Nepal who take up jobs shunned by Malays.

Government statistics indicate that there are approximately two million registered migrant workers, but human rights groups believe that the

figures are much higher as many work in the country without permits.

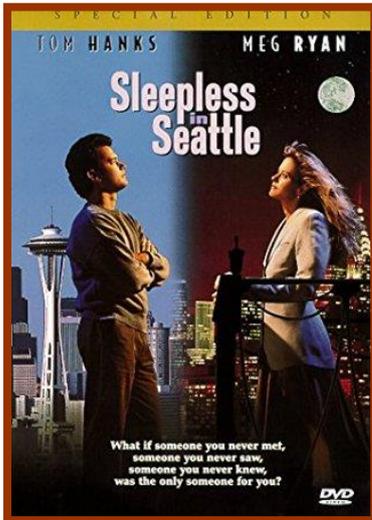
The rights group maintain that many workers are victims of human trafficking and debt bondage who have had to part with large sums to pay recruiters in return for jobs that paid much less than the ones they were promised.

## Slavery in Australian diplomatic residences

"Four Corners" an Australian investigative TV programme has recently reported that at least 20 domestic workers in Canberra's diplomatic district, have escaped exploitation in diplomatic residences, claiming that they had been made to work up to 18-hour days for a fraction of the minimum wage and being forbidden from leaving the premises. According to ABC News (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) there is little that law enforcement authorities can do to bring the perpetrators to justice because the employers enjoy diplomatic immunity.



## Editorial



*Adelina Sau was forced to sleep on the verandah where her employer's dog also slept.*

*(Photo: Steven Sim via Merdeka).*

Whenever I encounter the name of Seattle, I immediately think about the joys and laughter of watching "Frasier" my favourite American TV sitcom or the film "Sleepless in Seattle" featuring Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks. Funnily enough, both screenings revolve around a radio talk show but sadly the exultation and mirth has now been replaced by sadness as a result of the Newsweek revelations of the sexual activities of the employees of the city's tech firms.

It seems that this activity has been going on for some time now. A study commissioned by the Department of Justice in 2014 found that Seattle has the fastest growing sex industry in the United States, more than doubling in size between 2005 and 2012.

That boom correlates neatly with the boom of the tech sector there. It also correlates with the surge in high-paying jobs, since this "hobby" (the word johns use online to describe buying sex) can be expensive. According to the authorities some of these men spent \$30,000 to \$50,000 a year on their hobby.

Surely the best way of solving this problem is to adopt the policy which Sweden adopted back in 1999 of zero-tolerance for the buyers of sex. The then Government viewed prostitution as violence

against women and a clear sign of inequality. It rejected legalization based on its conviction that the majority of prostitutes do not choose prostitution – but are in it because of poverty, addiction, abuse, exploitation and coercion.

It is fair to say that prostitution in Sweden has not been eliminated, but buying sex in that country is now deemed so shameful that the majority of those arrested plead guilty and pay the fine rather than go to trial. The fine is based on income. If the buyer is unemployed, the minimum fine is about \$400. For everyone else, the maximum is 50 days' worth of income.

I do believe that the Swedish penalty system is used in some parts of the USA, but I would be interested to know from our US readers if that is correct.

It is ironic that in the same month we learn about the establishment of a special court in Malaysia to deal with slavery and human trafficking cases that we also hear about the shocking treatment metered out to an Indonesian domestic worker called Adelina who was rescued and taken to hospital by anti-slavery activists but who died after allegedly being abused by her Malaysian employer in Penang and forced to sleep at their car porch along with their pet dog.

Migrant rights group Tenaganita said that the day before she died, the 21year old Adelina sat on the porch, too terrified to respond to her rescuers. She only glanced at them and shook her head. A black Rottweiler, tied to a leash beside her, barked at the rescuers.

Neighbours claimed that they had often heard the employer scolding Adelina and that she had been forced to sleep on the porch for over a month.

Her rescuers noted pus on what appeared to be burn marks on the maid's legs. The employers have subsequently claimed that the burns were self-inflicted by cleaning fluid purchased after the maid had defecated in the kitchen's drain hole and clogged it up.

The employers stated that they had provided medication for Adelina. However, they claimed that as she had continued to pick at her wounds, they grew worse.

Adelina's employers (a man and a woman) have been remanded for investigation under a section of the Malaysian Penal Code for murder.

The Australian TV investigations into the activities of certain diplomats is yet another example of the impotence and frustrations acknowledged by civic and human rights authorities

(Cont'd on page 3)



## Editorial (Contd)

concerning the veil of immunity which has so far shielded from prosecution, foreign envoys who habitually abuse or enslave their own household staff.

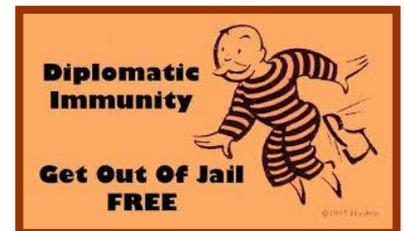
As Louise Milligan (Four Corners) explained in the Australian case, *“driving through the empty Canberra streets of the embassy district in the shadow of the nation's Parliament, there's a sense that this is the ideal place to hide (a slave) in plain sight. The only people we see are security guards, gardeners and diplomatic figures glimpsed behind tinted windows, as cars glide through electric gates which quickly snap shut”*

It seems that the only glimmer of hope currently available for the victims of such abuse, is if International Courts copy the UK Supreme Court's decision which last year ruled in favour of a Filipino domestic worker who had been trafficked and treated like a slave by a Saudi diplomat. As RAGAS reported last November, Cherrylyn Reyes went to an employment tribunal in 2001 claiming her former employers, Jarallah Al-Malki and his wife, had subjected her to physical and racial abuse, taken her passport, and paid her less than the minimum wage.

The tribunal and the Court of Appeal refused to hear her claims because her employers had diplomatic immunity in Britain, which meant they could not be tried. However, the UK's Supreme Court ruled that the employment tribunal **should** hear Reyes's allegations of abuse because Al-Malki and his wife were no longer shielded by immunity because his posting in the UK had finished and because the employment of Ms Reyes was not in the course of his official functions.

Attached in the next couple of pages are contributions from two RAGAS activists in the US about what is happening in their State in the fight against human trafficking and slavery. The contributions are from RAGAS Coordinator Dr George Belitsos from Iowa and Karen Walkowski from Minnesota who is the Chair of a Rotary Initiative to End Human trafficking in Minnesota and a member of the Rotary Club of Lake Minnetonka – Excelsior, District 5950.

Also included on pages 6 and 7 is a contribution from our RAGAS Coordinator in the Philippines, Ernesto Perez from the Rotary Club of Makati Central in District 3830. Ernesto sent me a draft of a Position Paper which he has prepared on behalf of the Anti-Trafficking OFW Movement (ATOM), with a view to the Paper being eventually submitted to the President of the Philippines. The Position Statement is fairly detailed, so I thought that I would leave some of the detail out but nevertheless share the substance of Ernesto's draft Paper with our readers to peruse.



Dr George Belitsos



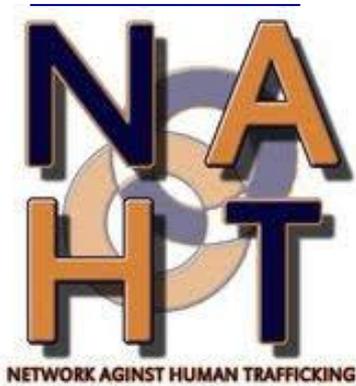
Ernesto Perez



## A Call for Volunteer Trainers to Combat Human Trafficking and Slavery in Iowa

by Dr George Belitsos, Rotary Club of Ames, D 6000,USA

Governor Kim Reynolds helped the Iowa Network against Human Trafficking (NAHT) to kick off the state wide Iowa Hotel/Motel Employee Training Project last September. Since then, three "Training of Trainers" sessions have been held in Des Moines, Cedar Rapids and Waterloo. Seventy-five volunteers have completed the training, and are now providing hotel/motel employee training. However, more volunteer trainers are needed and **training will take place on Thursday, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 6:00pm-9:00pm at Plymouth Church, 4126 Ingersoll Ave, Des Moines, Iowa 50312.**



Certificates of Recognition were recently given to three of the earliest hotels to complete employee training. The photo below shows Governor Kim Reynolds presenting certificates to the Baymont Inn & Suites located in Boone, the DeLux Hotel in Des Moines, and the Courtyard by Marriot in Ankeny. Certificates of completion have already been distributed to 22 hotels in central Iowa.

Today the Iowa Network Against Human Trafficking and Slavery is putting out a **call for new volunteers** to be trained to conduct an educational program for hotel/motel employees. Each volunteer will be provided with a 50-page training manual and a PowerPoint to utilize when training hotel employees. These training materials were developed by the Nebraska Coalition on Human Trafficking. The Nebraska Coalition has partnered with the Iowa NAHT to carry out this hotel training initiative.

A volunteer job description is linked for volunteer hotel/motel trainers and ambassadors. Each hotel on-site training is always carried out by a pair of volunteers. Please review the job description before you register for the March 8th training. Each trained volunteer must agree to provide a minimum of three training sessions either as an ambassador or trainer. Take note that this training is for those who reside in central Iowa.

**To register for the March 8th Central Iowa Hotel/Motel Training Project, contact Shirlee Reding at [shirlee5@q.com](mailto:shirlee5@q.com) and be sure to send all of your contact information.**

**Why focus on hotels and motels?** Hotels and motels are a primary location for sex trafficking, often unbeknown to managers and staff. The victims are advertised on the dark underbelly of the internet. Victims are moved daily from one hotel and city to another. Traffickers bring in women, many who are minors, to these hotels and motels. The traffickers view the hotel location as an opportunity for huge profits with very little risk of discovery or punishment.

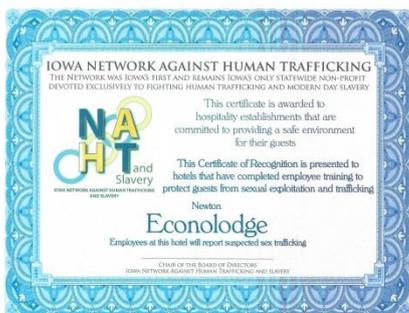
The goal of the Hotel/Motel Training Project is to promote meaningful intervention and prevention of sex trafficking. By educating hotel employees to both recognize and report sex trafficking, the project is discouraging and limiting sex trafficking locally.

The root causes of sex trafficking are greed and a subculture that accepts treating people, especially women and children, as sex objects that can be bought and sold. Poverty, child abuse and neglected at home, drug dependency and desperation lead to maintaining a pool of vulnerable victims.

Participating hotels will receive a certificate of recognition to display in their lobby.



Governor Kim Reynolds presenting certificates to hotel representatives



## Ending Human Trafficking in Minnesota

by Karen Walkowski, RC of Minnetonka-Excelsior, D5950  
Chair – Rotary Initiative to End Human Trafficking in Minnesota

A major sporting event (the National American Football Championship- the Super Bowl) coming to Minnesota this year raised the community awareness of human trafficking associated with this event. However we have learned that Human Trafficking in Minnesota is a significant problem even without the Super Bowl. Minnesota ranks 13<sup>th</sup> in the U.S.A. in the number of victims.

Leveraging the enhanced community awareness around this issue, the Rotary Districts in Minnesota have started a 3 year strategic initiative to end human trafficking in Minnesota. To do this, we have engaged all 3 Rotary districts that cover Minnesota (Districts 5950, 5960 and 5580) with the leadership for the next 3 years making a commitment to this initiative. This involves over 200 clubs, in 160 communities and over 5,000 Rotarians.

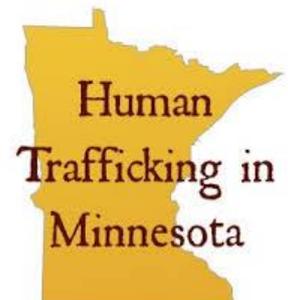
The overall mission of the initiative is to bring together organizations in Minnesota already doing great work to create a state wide plan to end human trafficking in the state that is implemented at the local level. To achieve this mission we have identified the following activities:

1. Raise awareness amongst Rotarians about the issue. To this end, we have:
  - Created a standard presentation, established a speaker's bureau and have made over 20 presentations to individual clubs. .
  - Presented at a breakout session at one of the districts in which over 100 Rotarians attended.
2. Host a Summit, bringing together representatives from over 200 organizations representing service providers, educators, law enforcement, legislators, and faith communities. The goal is to identify areas of duplication, service gaps and opportunities to improve communication, collaboration and coordination.
  - The output of this summit will be a plan to engage local Rotary clubs working with other organizations to end human trafficking in their community with ideas for specific projects.
  - The summit is scheduled for February 23.
3. Sponsor a statewide survey of all organizations addressing this issue from prevention through intervention, rescue, prosecution and restoration of the victims.
  - We are partnering with the Alliance for Freedom, Restoration and Justice, a nonprofit based in Nashville, Tennessee for the survey and for the summit.
4. Secure seed money to fund these activities. We believe that by creating a statewide plan and using the results of the survey, we can empower the organizations already doing great work and Rotary clubs to fill the gaps. We estimate a 4:1 return on investment from the initial seed money.

We are amazed and humbled at the number of organizations who have asked to partner with us in this initiative including state government, large foundations and service providers. We are excited about the groundswell in our community to work together to end this terrible thing.

We also hope that we can develop this as a model that can be replicated by other Rotary groups and their community leaders.

For more information on the Minnesota Initiative, contact: [kwalkow59@gmail.com](mailto:kwalkow59@gmail.com)



## A Position Paper – Trafficking in Persons A Challenge by the Anti-Trafficking OFW Movement (ATOM) for the Filipinos

By Ernesto Perez, RAGAS Coordinator for the Philippines



### OFW Joanna's Death

Joanna Daniella Demafelis, barely 29 years old, came home last Friday from working in Kuwait – in a crate. Grieving relatives, with government officials led by Foreign Affairs Secretary Allan Peter Cayetano met the remains of Joanna at the NAIA. The body was flown to her home in Iloilo.

All Joanna wanted was to provide for a better home for her parents, education for her siblings, and a better future for herself. Instead she went home with nothing but shattered dream for her family, herself a victim of unscrupulous recruiters, inhuman employers, a host nation which treated her like some statistics and naïve overseas welfare officials who did not treat with concern her relatives' desperate plea for assistance when she stopped getting in touch with them. All these people are parties to her untimely and cruel death.

Joanna's body was stuffed in a freezer in a Kuwait apartment that was abandoned by her Lebanese and Syrian employers in 2016. The body reportedly bore stab wounds and torture marks. Joanna's relatives looked for her when she stopped communicating with them, and sought help from Philippine authorities in Kuwait to no avail. The horrible death of Joanna, an OFW, has struck the conscience of the nation and of the civilized world.

We of the Anti-Trafficking OFW Movement (ATOM), as all Filipinos and citizens of the world, should rally behind President Rodrigo R. Duterte's call for all out protection of all our OFWs and should stop at nothing until justice is done and their protection is assured.

### Inability of Welfare Officer and Labor Attache to Assist

The relatives alleged they received no assistance from the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration and the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration. The Department of Labor and Employment has recalled its welfare officer and labor attaché in Kuwait. OWWA and POEA personnel were reportedly overwhelmed by the number of cases involving overseas Filipino workers in the Gulf state, which hosts an estimated 250,000 OFWs. Approximately 70 percent of the Filipinos are domestic helpers, like Joanna.

Her tragic fate should lead to a reassessment of the nation's capability to assist its massive army of migrant workers. At least 10 million Filipinos are working overseas, with their earnings accounting for a hefty 10 percent of gross domestic product and 8.3 percent of gross national income. Last year, OFWs remitted a record high \$31.29 billion – a 5.3 percent increase from the \$29.71 billion in 2016.

Secretary Cayetano said President Duterte has ordered authorities to do everything to protect OFWs. "Her death is very tragic, but this will also be a rallying point for all agencies to be more aggressive abroad," he added

*"Trafficking is simply a mechanism or a conduit that brings people into slavery. It is one process of enslavement itself, not a condition or result of that process.*

*(Professor Kevin Bales )*



## **A Position Paper against Trafficking in Persons (Cont'd)**

by Ernesto Perez, RAGAS Coordinator for the Philippines

### **Joanna was also a Victim of Human Trafficking**

Joanna's case could be treated as a form of human trafficking, given the lack of protection when she left the country for employment in Kuwait. The government's inability to track her down like most other overseas workers is a cause for concern and remedial measures should be immediately put in place. She is just one of the many victims of trafficking in and out of the country.

The Kuwaiti government reportedly requires foreign workers to surrender their passports to their employers to prevent them from leaving without clearance or consent from the employers. This requirement is unlawful under Philippine laws, and led Joanna to her cruel death in the hands of her employers, with the participation, knowingly or unknowingly, of her recruitment agency and labor officials who endorsed her employment contract. She was a victim of violence and exploitation, or involuntary servitude under our laws. The moment Joanna was required to surrender her passport to her foreign employers was the time she was deprived not only of her travel documents but also of her personality or identity as well. This was an act of involuntary servitude, totally unacceptable in a civilized world.

### **Full Support for President Duterte's Call for Protection and Assistance to OFWs**

Joanna's death should serve as wakeup call for the country. Never again should we allow it to happen to our OFWs. We therefore support President Duterte's decision to impose a travel ban on all our workers to Kuwait and to other countries until this inhuman requirement is removed. We also support President Duterte's plan to create a Department of Overseas Filipino Workers which he mentioned during his visit to the Middle East last year. This will speed up efforts to help OFWs, a move that the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines-Episcopal Commission on Migrants and Itinerant People supports.

We must stress that until that separate Department is created, all government agencies concerned should unite to address the problems of our OFWs. There has to be a convergence of efforts from all the national government agencies such as the Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Justice, Department of Interior and Local Government, Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), the Department of Health and the DSWD. With the cooperation of non-government agencies including ATOM, all efforts must be directed to give assistance to help the repatriated OFWs get back on their feet.

Our OFWs deserve all the assistance and protection they need so they will not fall victims to human trafficking and not suffer the same fate as Joanna

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