

## Eliminating Human Trafficking

Gabriel E. Idang

*Department of Philosophy, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria*  
*E-mail: gabrielidang@yahoo.com*

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**ABSTRACT** Human trafficking, in any part of the world, at any time and place, is evil, undesirable and morally wrong. It is an instrument for exploitation, oppression and humiliation: an alternative name for the old practice of slavery. It is a major social problem which employs all anti-social devices of deception, coercion, abduction and so on. It does not earn any person, group of persons or the society a good image and there is no justification for it. This work is an attempt by the researcher to explore the monster known as *human trafficking* in some dimensions of it and to show that it is dehumanizing hence, it should be stopped.

### INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is one of the social problems across the globe. In this paper the researcher shall endeavour to explore and examine this phenomenal, perennial vice with reference to, but not completely confined to Nigeria. Increased incidences of human trafficking in Nigeria have made it to be seen as one of the major problems that must be confronted in striving for national development. Since philosophy is the searchlight of reason and nothing escapes its beams, it is the task of philosophers to go into dialogue and make their insights known on contemporary problems that affect their society. Individuals that feed fat on the proceeds from the trafficking of humans, especially women and children need to be counselled with sound moral philosophy; and philosophy which is the voice of reason cannot afford to look away from the scourge of human trafficking that has led some to treat fellow humans not as belonging to the kingdom of ends, but as means only.

The scourge of human trafficking is indeed a global problem that has extensive and diverse dimensions. From the deception of the individuals to be trafficked, to the inhuman treatments they are subjected to in foreign lands such as forced labour, exploitation and so on; and even up to the laundering of the proceeds realised from this illicit trade, they all present issues that beg for a moral, rational and critical evaluation. But before we can have an appraisal of the dimensions of human trafficking, it is needful for us to have background knowledge of the meaning of human trafficking. This is because knowledge of the meaning and nature of human trafficking will, to a large extent, facilitate an un-

derstanding of the dimensions which this illicit trade is telling, and how it affects our moral consciousness when it blinds the moral conscience of those that trade in the trafficking of humans to the reality that humans should be treated with dignity as beings imbued with rationality. Let us now seek a deeper understanding of this phenomenon known as human trafficking.

### WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

Agbu (2003) sees human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons using force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, or vulnerability or giving and receiving of payments to achieve consent of a person or having control over another person. This definition succinctly captures the nature of human trafficking; it reveals the fact that human trafficking is itself a conglomeration of several other vices that combine to make it a hydra-headed problem. Human trafficking involves a series of activities that culminate in the transfer of persons either from one state to another or to a far distance within the same state through deception. Human trafficking involves the violation of the principle of informed consent in the sense that individuals who are trafficked are never informed of the fact that they are to be coerced into forced labour or any other vocation that humiliates them, reduces their sense of worth and punctures their ego and sense of dignity. Rather, they are lured with mouth-watering baits of better life prospects that are never realized.

Human trafficking is a new name for the old practice of slavery. Whether the consent of the

individuals to be trafficked is sought or not, the fact that they are exploited makes human trafficking to be morally wrong. In Nigeria for instance, Agbu (2003) writes that:

*1986 marked a watershed in the generation of emigrants for better or for worse. This year saw the introduction of the World-Bank sponsored Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) with its anti-poor conditionalities, leading to the generation of economic emigrants and brain drain. Among these economic emigrants are today's trafficked women and abused children, who, for the sake of a better life, ignorance or greed, or a combination of these, fall victims of the ploys of organized criminal and trafficking syndicates.*

Since then, Nigeria has become the source, transit and destination country for the trafficking of human beings. This clearly points to the fact that there is a fast decline in morality. Otakpor (2000) writes that it is the decline in morality that is at the root of the problem of Nigeria. He writes that "the continued existence of the Nigerian society is not in doubt, but it has as a necessary condition- the cultivation and sustenance of an acceptable morality. It currently verges on moral death because of the non-recognition of morality as a pre-requisite for its existence. It is the cultivation and sustenance of an acceptable morality that would reveal the damning consequences of such an ignoble trade as human trafficking.

Explaining how human trafficking is carried out in Nigeria, Idowu (2003) writes that the choice destination countries for trafficked Nigerian women and children include Italy, Belgium, United States, Spain and Saudi Arabia. While young Nigerian women are trafficked for prostitution in Italy, Spain, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands and the United Kingdom, elderly women are trafficked to the United States and the United Kingdom to work as nannies. To underscore the extent that the problem of human trafficking has eaten into the Nigerian society, Cortemiglia (2011) writes that at a time, it was estimated that between 60 to 80 percent of all immigrants - working in the commercial sex industry in Italy were Nigerians, with a substantial number in the Netherlands and Spain. Ume-Ezeoke (2011) also writes that "between 1999 and 2000, the Nigerian Embassy in Italy deported about eight hundred Nigerian women from Italy. Also, in 2001, about ten thousand

were also sent back to Nigeria". The problem of human trafficking continues to contribute significantly to the poor self image that Nigeria has in the comity of nations. The reasons that are often given for the practice range from poverty, greed and breakdown of the family system and values, to a general decline in morality. The prevalence of human trafficking in Nigeria points to the existence of its root causes in Nigeria. These constitute some of the major reasons for Nigeria's declining global and even regional relevance.

In answering the question of what the identifiable causes of trafficking in humans are, Agbu (2003) is of the opinion that "however, generally accepted is the view that greed and indolence rather than just poverty are the major reasons for some of the victims getting involved and subsequently trapped in a situation that continuously defiles their being". Underlying the crime of human trafficking are various layers of corruption that involve several factors. For instance, it is not hard to realize that those involved as recruiting, usually close family friends, perform various rituals and charms that they believe, would help them in keeping the victims under their spell. Travel touts and agents provide the necessary documents and make all necessary arrangements; foreign nationals work as temporary guides across borders or provide shelters and safe houses along the routes to harbour the victims if they are travelling by road and so on.

In Nigeria, for example, there is a meteoric rise in incidences and cases of human trafficking. Agbu (2003) writes that this is not unrelated to the prevalence of corruption in the Nigerian society. For instance, it is corruption that turned a former Nigerian police officer into a human trafficker caught in Guinea with thirty-three young women between the ages of 18 and 20 (Odunuga 2007). It is corruption that made it possible for some holy places to be flooded by trafficked victims under the guise of religious pilgrimages (Odunuga 2008). It is on record that over 1000 Nigerians were deported by the central administration of one of the religious cities between January and March in 2004. Odunuga (2008) writes that among the deportees were over 370 minors between the ages of 8 and 14. The link between the procurers of victims and their external collaborators may be hard to determine, but it is logical to assume that there

must be syndicates within the law enforcement agencies on both sides that aid the illegal movement of victims. In respect to this, Agbu (2003) is of the opinion that in Nigeria, the police used to worsen the already dire situation of the repatriated victims by subjecting them to persecution and extortion while they are in holding cells, instead of showing empathy, counselling them and enhancing their rehabilitation. This is the reason why some see corruption as the root cause of human trafficking.

Prior to 2003, there was no anti-human trafficking law in Nigeria. This is why it can be said that the lack of appropriate legislation to punish offenders constituted a major challenge in the fight against human trafficking. In the interim, the police and the courts resorted to using some portions of the country's penal code. This is why, sometimes, some human traffickers were charged with forgery (forging of travelling documents) or abduction as the case may be. But these offences look really mild and do not arouse the attention and seriousness they should get when we are made to know that they are cases of human trafficking. However, with the enactment of the trafficking in persons (prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act, it is indeed possible to say that significant progress has been made in the war against human trafficking in Nigeria. But behind the application of laws as punishments or restraints to human trafficking, there is a more serious question that points to the fact that human trafficking is a moral problem. Morality, as we know it, takes precedence over law and is itself the standard for law. Omoregbe (1989) writes that law is at the service of morality and dares not contradict morality without ipso facto ceasing to be law and losing its right to be obeyed. This serves to illustrate the point that human trafficking is first and foremost a moral problem that can be better evaluated and solved through ethical or moral solutions.

The prevalence of human trafficking in the Nigerian society raises a lot of philosophical questions; for instance, one may ask about human beings and what they are. Are human beings like marketable commodities? Does it not indict human rationality when man exploits another man and treats him as a means to an end, namely profit? Do ethical questions not arise in the business of human trafficking? Should profit constitute the only motivation for

business? Is it not both rational and wise that moral consideration should be followed when deciding to practise a trade? These and more questions continue to perplex the minds of those who see human trafficking as a failure to heed the Kantian call that all humans should be seen as belonging to a kingdom of ends - we should never treat men as means to any end. Human trafficking leads to the exploitation and abuse of the victims of human trafficking who are sometimes deceived or lured with very tempting baits of improved economic well-being. The lasting impression that victims of human trafficking experience definitely affects their sense of worth and personal dignity. This is the reason why moral considerations ought to debar one from practising human trafficking since it is a serious crime against humanity to do so. Victims of human trafficking are denied freedom, liberty and equality. They are never treated justly as beings whose dignity should be upheld. This is the reason why we want to look immediately into the dimensions of human trafficking and examine it in order to carefully analyze the various dimensions that this ignoble trade impacts on our society negatively.

#### **DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

Human trafficking involves the abducting, tricking and coercing which amount to holding a person against his or her will and exploiting him or her as child soldier, domestic servant, sex worker or forced labourer. The question here is why should rational humans be treated as marketable commodities? The problem with human trafficking is that the series of activities that make it possible cannot pass the test of moral acceptability. The researchers are going to examine human trafficking from the humanistic dimension where they will appeal to the fact that humans should not subject one another to unjust and exploitative treatment since they all belong to family of humanity. Secondly, they hope to show that moral considerations in the business of human trafficking can point out that profit should not remain the only motive for business engagements. Human trafficking seems to be founded on the misguided belief that moral or ethical consideration should not matter in business; that profit should be the only parameter with which to measure economic or busi-

ness success. Let us now look at these issues piece-meal.

### **Humanistic Dimension of Human Trafficking**

To say that an action or a gesture is humanistic one is to some extent commending the said action or gesture. To be humanistic is to be concerned with the well-being of man. The restoration of the dignity of man is one of the ideals of humanism. The researcher shall not go deep into the recent dichotomy between the old and new humanism, but intends to show that if humanism sees the restoration of the dignity of man as one of its principal aims, then it is bound to be at odds with human trafficking which, given its exploitative nature, smacks of anything humane. Etuk (2004) writes that the central theme and objective of all humanism is the restoration of the dignity of man. This objective remains still valid for all humanist movements today. Does today's Nigerian man, woman, or child have any dignity even before his/her fellow countryman and women? Human trafficking tramples upon cherished human values of the other person such as love, honesty, justice, happiness and peace. These values cannot thrive in an atmosphere of exploitation but since human trafficking is predicated on exploitation, then it lacks in every sense, those values that should make for the respect of human dignity.

Human trafficking does not see humans as beings imbued with dignity. It does not treat men as ends in themselves around which every other means must revolve. It is necessary for us to offer an explanation here. To treat man as an end, is to see human well-being, welfare and development as the goal of every endeavour. But to treat man as a means only is to see him as an utilizable variable to the attainment of another end whether such as selfish gratification of sexual pleasure or economic progress. In responding to the question of how one treats another person as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself, Barnes (1996) writes that:

*You treat people as mere means when you use them for your own purposes without regard to their interests. Your doing something which is in fact in their best interest does not, however, mean that you have not treated them as a mere means because how you can treat someone has to do with your reason for acting as*

*you do and not just for the consequence of your action. I may do something that benefits you, but if why I did it, had nothing to do with its benefit to you, then I have still treated you as a means.*

Aristotle (1984) believed that rationality is a destructively human characteristic. Rationality here is the ability to think and shape one's environment with thought and action (Njoku 2002). It is essentially a human characteristic and a destructive character of the soul. In short, from Aristotle through the middle ages to the 18th century, culminating in Immanuel Kant, humans have been described as rational beings. They possess reason which distinguishes them from other animals. Given that reason is that which separates man from other animals, would mankind not be acting without recourse to his rationality anytime he exploits his fellow man? Quite surprisingly, Aristotle believed that it is both expedient and right for some to remain under servitude and slavery. In explaining Aristotle's position on unequal social status, Russell (1979) writes that:

*Greek philosophers including Plato and Aristotle had a different conception of justice and it is still widely prevalent... they thought that ... some men in virtue of their character and aptitudes have a wider sphere than others, and there is no injustice if they enjoy a greater share of happiness.*

This is probably the major reason why Aristotle believes that some individuals such as slaves can be used as means to various ends as their owners may please. Given Aristotle's stand on slavery, we can strongly suspect that he would have sought justificatory grounds for human trafficking if it was prevalent in his time. But we know that, the exploitation, humiliation and abuse suffered by victims of slave trade are similar to those suffered by victims of the trade of human trafficking. Since slavery has been abandoned because of its hindrance to the full realization of human dignity, equality and freedom, human trafficking too is to be abandoned because it is the modern garb of slavery. Human dignity, rationality and all values that are destructively human cannot be realized or expressed in an atmosphere of coercion, deception and exploitation. In order to restore human dignity, there is the need to attack human trafficking seriously as this is one sure way of enhancing human welfare, happiness and development.

### **Ethical and Economic Dimensions of Human Trafficking**

It has been noted that some identifiable causes of trafficking in humans include poverty, greed, breakdown of the family system and values and general decline in morality (Agbu 2003). Some victims of human trafficking especially children are trafficked at very tender ages. This means that their informed consent cannot be successfully sought in order to inform them of the fact that they are to be shipped into strange lands where they would be exploited. Even victims who are up to the age of understanding what human trafficking is all about are often times deceived and lured with baits into accepting to be trafficked, if not coerced. The use of charms and amulets in order to cast spells on abducted victims to prevent their resistance is very common among human traffickers. All these maladies combine to rob the victim of having complete knowledge of human trafficking.

Apart from this, the fact that human traffickers are motivated by profit makes them no less different from slave dealers who used to source for slaves and sell them to the slave merchants in the heydays of slave trade in Africa. Now human trafficking is to some persons (the traffickers) a booming business. It is common place hearing people say that ethics and moral considerations have little or no relevance to business since the motivating consideration in business is profit. This view is very erroneous even though it is widely held. The goal of business should be serving humanity and not just making of profit. Profit should be the reward that one gets from serving humanity well. In this sense, profit should be the means and measure of our service and in no way an end in itself.

Human traffickers seek to make profit at the expense of victims of human trafficking who suffer the most inhumane condition. The fact that some are deceived, coerced or charmed in order for them to submit to whatever dehumanizing treatments they may go through in the course of human trafficking makes human trafficking to be detested by all right-thinking persons. A society that practices human trafficking cannot be a just society. A just society is one in which people's lives and property are secured and they are free to own property, order its direction, determine the purpose to which they are put, engage in consensual transactions and

freely pursue their conception of happiness. These ideals cannot be realized when abduction, deception and coercion are all employed in order to successfully ship victims of human trafficking across borders where they are allowed or forced to do all kinds of odd jobs.

### **ELIMINATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING: THE WAY FORWARD**

Human trafficking has in recent times become one of the major problems that has earned for the Nigerian society a very poor self image. It is a new name for the ancient practice of slavery. Trafficked persons are seldom treated with dignity; they are rarely treated justly. They are often treated as individuals to whom justice cannot be applied in dealing with them. There are various ways in which human trafficking takes place. It can take place within a society or state when, for instance, a child is sent to live with a relative. This method of placing children in the care of extended families is a subtle method of human trafficking that cannot be compared with the type that involves travelling across countries. In whatever form, human trafficking is to be rejected by all right-thinking persons since children trafficked for domestic services are sometimes engaged in forced labour; some are deceived, abducted or even charmed in order to forestall any resistance to human trafficking. The trade of human trafficking cannot pass the test of moral justification no matter how we look at it.

The atmosphere of moral decadence which makes it possible for human trafficking to be carried out is a picture of the general decline in morality in any human society. What this means is that human trafficking is, first and foremost, a moral problem. As a moral problem, human trafficking needs a moral solution. An immoral society is one permeated by corruption, fraud, dishonesty, selfishness, embezzlement of public funds and other immoral acts including human trafficking. The process of human trafficking includes many immoral acts which combine to make human trafficking a hydra-headed problem. A morally sick society can only be cured by moral regeneration. When the moral consciousness of the practitioners and benefactors of human trafficking are illumined to the degradation and abuse brought about by the illicit trade, then the rationality of engaging in it

is brought to question. The best way to address the problem of the immorality involved in the practice of trafficking in persons is through a moral renaissance where hard-work, integrity and honesty are celebrated while dishonesty, fraud and corruption are punished. Human trafficking only survives and become a booming business in an encouraging atmosphere provided by a gross decline in morality.

### CONCLUSION

As the researcher has stated in this paper, human trafficking is sometimes seen as a trade that can be justified on economic reasons. In other words, those who engage in human trafficking are sometimes seen as those who are attempting to make a living out of it. But this justification, on a closer scrutiny, is ephemeral because the sole motive for business should not be profit but service to the society. Apart from this, human trafficking is a booming business in any society because such a society provides an encouraging atmosphere for it to thrive. Human trafficking is only a fallout of the problem of moral decadence that has vitiated any serious effort at development especially in the third world. Human trafficking only survives where there is the prevalence of dishonesty, fraud, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, selfishness, and so on. In this sense, human trafficking cannot be successfully dealt with unless we grapple with its root cause which is immorality. With a moral regeneration where values are celebrated and vices are rejected, the problem of

human trafficking together with other negative vices will give way to a better society.

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