

Honoring Heroes in the Fight Against Modern Slavery

May 1, 2007

House of Lords, London

On May 1, 2007, Geneva Global, along with the Templeton Foundation and Lord David Alton honored five heroes in the fight against modern slavery. The date commemorates the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in Britain. The heroes honored, like William Wilberforce, who led the effort to abolish the slave trade 200 years ago, are leaders in their own communities. They have all seen the toll of modern slavery first-hand and have taken courageous action to liberate the enslaved and end this scourge that traps as many as 27 million people around the world. Each of these heroes has an amazing, inspiring story:

Iana Matei's organization, Reaching Out Romania, provides shelter for trafficking victims from Romania and enables them to live independent lives.

Ruchira Gupta, of Apne Aap in India, helps women escape forced prostitution by providing them with skills to earn a living and support their children.

Father Raymond D'Souza's Diocesan Development and Welfare Society rescues child slaves in India and teaches them to be self-reliant.

Alexis Danikuu's AGREDS helps rehabilitate Malawian children trafficked into prostitution and domestic labor, training them to earn a living and helping them to return to their families.

Fernando Lopez, of Defense for Children International, leads the fight for legal reforms to protect sexually exploited children in Ecuador.

More than 125 dignitaries from the United States and the United Kingdom attended the event hosted by Lord Alton including members of the House of Lords and House of Commons. Dignitaries included: Valerie Amos, leader of the House of Lords; Caroline Cox, deputy speaker of the House of Lords; Dr. Jonathan Sacks, chief rabbi, United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth; Dr. John Templeton Jr., president of the John Templeton Foundation; George Carey, the 103rd archbishop of Canterbury, retired; Cardinal Cormack Murphy O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster; Lord Brian Griffiths, vice chairman of Goldman Sachs and George Alagiah, BBC News anchorman.

“We came together today to *commemorate* the achievements of the 19th Century abolitionists, *celebrate* the work of these five local heroes and *confront* the problem of slavery today,” said Steve Beck, CEO of Geneva Global. “We remember there are still 27 million people worldwide living in slavery. The five 21st Century abolitionists we honor today share the same determination and righteous indignation of their 19th Century forebears. Like William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, they have successfully mobilized civil society, government and law enforcement to fight slavery and human trafficking in their communities. But their efforts alone will not eradicate the problem. Their strategies and results should be studied and used as models for organizations and countries to follow.”

Each of the five had previously received project grants from Geneva Global clients. On May 1, they received a recognition award and \$5,000 to further their work. [Click here for more details on the work of these modern day abolitionists.](#)

• **Iana Matei, Reaching Out Romania:** Founded in 1998, Reaching Out Romania has been assisting trafficking victims for nearly 10 years. Operating in a remote, impoverished region of Romania neglected by most nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), Reaching Out Romania's efforts include a shelter, where victims of trafficking receive medical care, counseling, legal assistance, educational support and life skills training; and prevention programs, that educate rural Romanians - primarily women - on how to avoid being trafficked. One young woman, Carmen Dulgheru, received a year and a half of recovery care at a Reaching Out shelter that enabled her to complete grade school and enter high school part time while working full time. "I owe them everything," she says. Carmen had been sold into forced prostitution at 12, first in Turkey, then in Spain, before being rescued by Iana Matei's network as traffickers plotted to send her to Spain a second time. "The organization gives these women their first safe home where they can learn to care for themselves and begin to take the necessary steps to live independent lives," says Rachel Chanin Asiel, a Geneva Global research analyst based in Belgrade, Serbia.

With a grant from a Geneva Global client, Matei is expanding Reaching Out Romania's program to include income-generating activities, focusing specifically on preparing the region's rural agricultural workers for Romania's entry into the European Union. Offering training by international experts, this new effort will help farmers adapt to demanding new market standards and practices they must implement by the end of 2007. Success will help farming families confront the poverty that contributes to their vulnerability to human traffickers. Matei's work on trafficking issues has been recognized by the U.S. State Department, in its Global Trafficking in Persons report.

• **Ruchira Gupta, Apne Aap, India:** Founded in 1998, Apne Aap works with women who resort to prostitution for survival income as well as their children in Mumbai (Bombay) and Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), helping women build their skills and providing them with options to leave prostitution. According to the Worldwatch Institute, Mumbai, India's largest city, had twice the population of New York City in 2001, "but 20 times the number of prostitutes." Children born or brought up in a brothel are impaired in many ways, especially in "their psychosocial development," Sweden-based Save the Children said in a 2001 report. Recognizing this, Apne Aap launched a pilot art therapy workshop in 2005 for children of prostitutes in two red light districts of Kolkata. A grant through Geneva Global expanded the art therapy program, which has measurably improved children's sense of self worth and their performance in school. The grant also enabled Apne Aap to train representatives from 30 other organizations that work with at risk children to conduct art therapy programs. Ruchira Gupta, Apne Aap's executive director, founded Apne Aap after winning an Emmy for her documentary "The Selling of Innocents," which highlighted the trafficking of Nepali girls to brothels in Mumbai. Prior to founding Apne Aap, Gupta worked with several Indian national newspapers and BBC News. She has also worked as a consultant for UNICEF, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Health Organization. Sky News India correspondent Alex Crawford described Gupta as "ferociously tenacious" in her commitment to help women caught in the web of trafficking (See "Battle for her Daughter," Tuesday, April 10, 2007).

• **Father Raymond D'Souza, Diocesan Development & Welfare Society (DDWS), India:** DDWS has been implementing community-based development in 12 districts in Uttar Pradesh state in central India for 25 years. DDWS has been rescuing children from slavery since 1995, setting up its Bal Vikas Ashram (BVA) project in 1999, helping former child slaves become self-reliant and avoid being re-trafficked. "Father D'Souza is very passionate and committed to this cause ... a visionary," says Sylvester John, executive director of Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh-based Steward's Trust. "BVA helps rescued children get back their families and supports them to get an education and build a life afresh." A

philanthropy investment through Geneva Global expanded the BVA project into three new districts, carrying out rescue operations to free child laborers, as well as fighting the root causes of trafficking. An estimated 200,000 to 300,000 children, typically between 7 and 15, work essentially as slaves in the carpet belt of Uttar Pradesh, according to a 2003 report by the American Anti Slavery Society and the Australian Anti Slavery Society. Many of these children are separated from their poverty stricken families, and work in “highly deplorable” conditions, says D’Souza. “Most of these families have taken loans from traffickers in the past and are unable to clear their debts, which (forces) them to give away their children without any protest.”

• **Alexis Danikuu, Assemblies of God Relief and Development Services (AGREDS), Ghana:** AGREDS has been fighting trafficking in Accra, Ghana since 1998 when it estimated the number of child laborers there at 25,000 and rising. Most were girls between 7 and 16 trafficked from rural, impoverished areas to cities. “The majority of these women end up as prostitutes,” says Danikuu, AGREDS project director. “Some parents, especially those in rural areas, virtually give out their children to child traffickers because they barely have enough to eat and they think their children could be better off elsewhere.” Traffickers even pay a small fee often, and promise parents that the children will return with improved finances. Instead, most are confined “to forced labor, sex slavery, physical abuse, malnutrition, drug abuse and all kinds of exploitation” after they arrive in the cities, Danikuu says. Many ultimately seek escape by joining youth gangs.

AGREDS operates a rehabilitation and training center close to the main market in Accra, where many trafficked children are forced to work. Trafficked children are offered counseling and training in making dresses, batik, soap, cosmetics and pastries. Children also receive help reintegrating into their home communities. Their families receive small business loans to boost family income. A Geneva Global brokered grant enabled AGREDS to expand these activities to rescue more children and to increase the incomes of vulnerable families and trafficked children. Endel Liias, a Geneva Global account manager who visited the Accra center in 2006, said, “Girls who were involved in the skills training ... were so excited about the opportunity they were being given.”

• **Fernando Lopez, Defense for Children International, Defensa de Niños Internacional (DNI), Ecuador:** The Ecuador section of DNI started in 1986 to develop, strengthen and protect children’s rights through preventive education, advocacy and public policy. A Geneva Global client’s grant enabled DNI to successfully advocate for new legislation criminalizing the commercial sexual exploitation of children, granting legal protection to more than 30,000 children. In addition, DNI succeeded in training 601 community leaders to recognize and stop the child sex trade, and compiled a database on trends in commercial sexual exploitation in Ibarra, Ecuador. “DNI influences the local governments to implement programs that they should be doing in the first place,” says Ana Maria Granja, DNI’s executive director. A 2004 U.S. State Department report showed that poverty and the lack of economic opportunity made Ecuador both a staging area and a destination country for people trafficked for sexual exploitation and forced labor. A year earlier, the State Department said Ecuadorians were trafficked to Guatemala, Uruguay, Venezuela and the United Kingdom, adding that many of the victims were children being trafficking for prostitution.