Modern-Day Slavery
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10.26.2009 | Culture and Society  Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery that violates human rights globally — and in the heartland of America.

That stark message will be delivered at the Dayton Human Trafficking Accords international conference Nov. 9-10 at the University of Dayton.

Held in collaboration with the Anti-Trafficking Program of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services, the forum will bring together law enforcement officials, victims’ advocates, academic experts, students and the public "for the purpose of stirring society's conscience to action against trafficking and slavery," said Mark Ensalaco, director of the University of Dayton’s human rights program. The media co-sponsor is WYSO Radio.

Participants will sign the Dayton Human Trafficking Accords as an expression of a common commitment to end human trafficking, punish offenders and promote new laws against the dehumanizing practice, according to Ensalaco, who also serves as the Rev. Raymond A. Roesch Chair in Social Sciences.

It's a timely effort. Just today, the FBI, as part of a nationwide initiative to end domestic sex trafficking of children, recovered 52 children and arrested 60 pimps allegedly involved in child prostitution. That included seven juveniles from Toledo and pimps in Toledo and Columbus, according to Ensalaco.

Ensalaco and sociology professor and conference co-chair Claire Renzetti say human trafficking is largely a hidden crime, but the problem is enormous. Consider:

• As many as 20 million people worldwide are subjected to slavery or modern-day forms of slavery, such as involuntary servitude, peonage or debt bondage, according to the U.S. State Department and the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime. Victims are typically women and children who are often afraid to seek help for fear they'll be arrested for prostitution or immigration violations;

• As many as 800,000 victims are trafficked into slavery across national boundaries each year, according to the U.S. State Department;

• As many as 17,000 people are trafficked into the U.S. each year from Asia, Central and South America, and Eastern Europe. They are exploited for prostitution, stripping and pornography, domestic servitude; sweatshop labor and migrant agricultural work, according to the U.S. State Department;

• Ohio is an origin, transit and destination state for human trafficking, according to the FBI. Ensalaco estimates the state has at least 100 cases.

The conference will kick off at 7 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 9, in the Sears Recital Hall with a conversation with E. Benjamin Skinner, winner of the 2009 Dayton Literary Peace Prize for non-fiction for A Crime So Monstrous: Face to Face With Modern Day Slavery. It's free and open to the public and will be followed by a book signing.

An invitation-only afternoon working session with federal, state and local law enforcement officials and victims’ advocates will take place on Tuesday, Nov. 10. Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray will address the group about stopping human trafficking in Ohio.

A 6 p.m. public forum in the Kennedy Union Ballroom, "Trafficking is Slavery," will feature a keynote talk by Kristyn Peck Williams, program support coordinator for the Anti-Trafficking Services Program of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services office. A panel will include Sharla Musabih and Yeshe Riske, founders of United Hope in United Arab Emirates and Ethiopia; Celia Williamson, activist and University of Toledo professor of social work who developed the Lucas County Human Trafficking Coalition; and Theresa Flores, author of The Sacred Bath: An American Teen’s
Story of Modern Day Slavery.

At 15, Flores was drugged, raped and tortured for two years while living in an upper-class suburb in Detroit. After 20 years of silence, she began telling her story to help others. A licensed social worker, she is the director of development for Gracehaven, a safe home in Dublin, Ohio, for girls under the age of 18 who have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation. She earned a master's degree in counseling education from the University of Dayton in 2007.

The evening will wrap up with the screening of the film, "Playground," and a conversation with filmmaker Libby Spears. Independent filmmaker Steven Bognar of FilmDayton will moderate the discussion.

The Dayton Human Trafficking Accords conference is the latest in a series of conferences organized by the University of Dayton to address human rights issues, such as violence against women and the rights of children. Last October, at a campus event held in partnership with the Minneapolis-based Center for Victims of Torture, University of Dayton President Daniel J. Curran and Cincinnati Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk signed a national petition calling for the president of the United States to reject torture.

The University of Dayton is a pioneer in human rights education. In 1998, the University launched the country's first undergraduate human rights program. In 2007, the University of Dayton began offering a bachelor's degree in human rights studies.

For more information about the Dayton Human Trafficking Accords conference, call 937-229-2765 or visit http://academic.udayton.edu/humantrafficking.

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