

Don't Turn a Blind Eye to This Atrocity on International Women's Day

I don't bake much, but when I do, it's usually at Christmas.

I follow one of my grandmother's most cherished recipes: her incredible, red-velvet chocolate cake. It's hard work to get it right, but it's worth it because of all the memories that come flooding back with that first bite.

While baking makes many of us think of the past, girls trapped in Thailand's sex industry are eager to learn to bake so they can look to a brighter future.

That's one of the reasons World Help is working to build a baking school in Pattaya, Thailand. This school will give young women the opportunity to gain job skills they can use to find work outside of the red-light district.

They will be able to find employment in places like restaurants, cafes and hotel bakeries. But their future can't start until this baking school is complete. That's why we are asking people to join us in this initiative, especially today on International Women's Day.

Poverty Robs Women of Choices

In Thailand, there is incredible cultural pressure for women to financially support their families, and that often includes extended family. One woman may be taking care of her mother, brother and grandmother as well as her own children. I've met girls who were trying to bear the financial responsibility for up to 11 people in their household.

This burden makes young women desperate for work, especially those who grew up in poor, rural villages and could not afford

to go to school.

They are often lured to cities like Pattaya by the prospect of job opportunities. Once they arrive, however, they often find their lack of education leaves them with one choice – working in the city’s booming red-light district.

As our partner in Thailand often says, “Poverty is the pimp.”

Every night thousands of girls in Pattaya sell their bodies so their families can survive. They’ve always felt like the sex industry was their *only* option. Until now.

The opportunity to learn a valuable trade at the new baking school will open up a world of possibilities for them to pursue.

Baking Can Make All the Difference

Baking is cutting edge in Thailand. Most people don’t have ovens in their homes. But cafes are becoming trendy, and baked goods are in high demand, which means trained bakers are in high demand, too.

Sopa know this, and she is hoping that baking will soon become her ticket out of poverty.

Sopa, whose name I’ve changed to protect her privacy, never received an education. Her family struggled in a Thai slum, and she was expected to find a job in order to provide.

“In the poor areas,” our partner explained, “there are extremely poor schools. So even if someone has academic potential, they don’t understand or know it. [Sopa] is one of those.”

At age 17, Sopa—like so many girls who work in the bars—was out of options.

Then, she was introduced to a Freedom Home ... and to baking.

Sopa was able to live in a safe family environment away from the pressures of the slum and the red-light district. She is attending a good school and has even discovered an exciting new hobby.

One of the staff taught Sopa and the other girls at the home how to make banana muffins. Sopa fell in love with the process and with the way she could make people happy with her culinary creations. Every day, she comes home from school and asks if she can bake something.

Today Is the Perfect Day to Empower Women

I'll never forget my first trip to Thailand to visit with girls trapped in sexual slavery. I was shocked to see women standing up in front of dozens of men with numbers pinned to their clothing. *They were literally being sold like animals.*

Sex shouldn't be for sale, and neither should a girl's self-worth.

The theme for this year's International Women's Day is #BalanceforBetter, fighting for gender balance in the workplace and beyond. I hope you will join us today in helping create a little more balance in our world. Even learning how to bake a red velvet chocolate cake can help a woman find freedom from the sex industry.

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Charisma News will launch the podcast series, "The Truth About Human Trafficking," March 11. Visit for the episodes, which will feature survivors, prosecutors and abolitionists, and subscribe on iTunes or wherever you listen to podcasts to catch these powerful interviews.

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