

Is the 'Sound of Freedom' Awakening Our Collective Conscience Yet?

Whatever the political controversy surrounding the release of "Sound of Freedom," the silence from the mainstream media and Hollywood is deeply troubling.

I have been leading the Dignity Freedom Network for over 20 years, challenging the sexual abuse of children not only in India but around the world. I know firsthand that the industry and its underground network are a painful reality. But apparently in Hollywood, the ideology and politics of filmmakers matter more to some than the urgent need of exposing sex trafficking crimes.

Combating this wicked industry—and the evildoers who fuel its demand—must be a nonpartisan, nonsectarian issue.

With the help and cooperation of local governments in India, we have seen success in the fight against child sex trafficking. By working together to combat the practice of ritual prostitution, whereby young girls are taken pre-puberty and offered to the gods as sexual slaves, we are now approaching a tipping point. In the past, India has been classified as the center of modern-day slavery by many organizations fighting to end it. But, by God's grace, we believe in the next decade the practice of ritualized prostitution of young girls will be history.

Nevertheless, many girls here are still sold into brothels in major Indian cities, and even in neighboring countries.

I recall Angela. She stood before me and explained how she and her sister watched the horrific self-immolation of their mother, who was tormented most of her life as a ritualized

prostitute. Angela's mother lived in constant fear and depression, wondering if anyone would free her, protect her and give her a new lease on life. Yet night after night, men came to use and abuse her.

The last time we witnessed well-orchestrated violence against Christians here in India, with more than 40,000 Christians and tribals displaced, the aftermath resulted in sex trafficking for many of the victims. Now with the increased violence against Christians in the state of Manipur and the displacement of about 60,000 citizens, the trafficking of Manipur girls looms on the horizon if we don't give immediate attention to the rehabilitation of displaced people.

Poverty and social unrest always leave women and girls vulnerable to traffickers worldwide. My heart aches as I think of the tens of thousands of girls in my homeland who need protection, rescue and rehabilitation.

The truth is that rich and powerful pedophiles still prey on children and young women worldwide, and others choose not to stop it. We know that these hideous crimes are happening in America and throughout the West. In fact, it is the financial power of the West that sustains the child sex industry from Bangkok, to Mumbai, to the Gulf, to London and elsewhere. It's no secret that Westerners end up in Thailand, Vietnam or the Philippines to engage in the abuse of children. The pornography industry is also focused on children in Thailand, Nepal, throughout Africa and elsewhere.

The faith of Jim Caviezel and the movie producers led them to produce "Sound of Freedom.'" Yet everyone, irrespective of faith or politics, should have the same level of outrage for the plague of child trafficking.

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What's more, the legalization of pedophilia is certainly just around the corner for western nations. Earlier this year we saw a report from the International Commission of Jurists, backed by the U.N., that essentially normalizes sex with minors. In an era where the sexualization of children and sex-ed curriculum is pushed earlier and earlier on the life of a minor, there should be no doubt that we'll reap what we sow.

We must confront this evil in all its forms, despite any cunning arguments to the contrary.

Whatever we already know about the sexual abuse of children, certainly more horrifying realities are hiding in plain sight. That some have made human trafficking a lucrative financial enterprise should not surprise us, and it should not be a controversial discussion.

Yet where are the loudest voices of the "me too" movement on this issue? This equally detestable cultural stain deserves the same unrelenting outcry that innocent women earned seven years ago.

It is tragic but it is also telling how "Sound of Freedom" exposes hypocrisy within Hollywood. Does Hollywood only take up social causes when they know the powerful and the larger film fraternity will praise them?

"Sound of Freedom"—and any other movie, documentary or series that shines a spotlight on the cruel reality of child sex trafficking—is a critical development for innocent children trying to survive in the dark corners of our world.

Even if actors and filmmakers are ridiculed for spending time on this cause, I pray they keep tuning out the naysayers and turning up the volume. Because millions of boys and girls depend on their advocacy. {eoa}

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Archbishop Joseph D'Souza is an internationally renowned human and civil rights activist. He is the founder of Dignity Freedom Network, an organization that advocates for and delivers humanitarian aid to the marginalized and outcastes of South Asia. He is archbishop of the Anglican Good Shepherd Church of India and serves as the president of the All India Christian Council.