

Forty-Seven Women Climb Mt. Kilimanjaro to Combat Human Trafficking

Mount Kilimanjaro is about to meet with 47 faith-filled women determined to climb its challenging terrain—for a cause. The women are climbing to raise awareness and funds to combat oppression, slavery, exploitation and global trafficking.

Dubbed The Freedom Climb, the Operation Mobilization event symbolizes the challenging climb that marginalized women face while struggling to emerge from oppression.

According to Operation Mobilization's research, there are about 27 million slaves in the world today trapped in various forms of bondage and abuse. Three out of four of those slaves are women. What's more, 800,000 people will be sex-trafficked this year alone. Eighty percent of them will be female and 50 percent will be children.

Cathey Anderson, who teaches sustainable farming to African nationals in Malawi, had the vision to get a small group of friends to climb Kilimanjaro for the cause. Within a few months, that vision attracted 46 other women from all over the world—from 18 to 73 years old—committed to raising their voices and funds through their networks of friends and family.

"I talk to friends here in the States, and they say 'What can we do with such a huge problem?' I tell them 'We can all make a difference for one woman and one child at a time! We can cry out on that woman's behalf and try to meet her needs—and see freedom for her!'" says Anderson. "That will change not only her future but all the generations after her. We know we will not end slavery and human trafficking with this climb. We can, however, bring hope and an opportunity for freedom to women and children who currently have none."

Mt. Kilimanjaro is the highest freestanding mountain in the world, towering over Tanzania at 19,340 feet. The mountain's summit is known as Uhuru Peak. Uhuru is the Swahili word for "freedom," and the climb is symbolic of the hope that women and children worldwide can be free of their circumstances. The climb is set for Jan. 11, which is National Human Trafficking Awareness Day in the United States.

"It is for me personally a very special journey," says South African climber Suria Scholtz. "It is my prayer that women will be able to identify with their oppressed sisters in various parts of the world and that God will create compassion in their hearts to become involved in their climb to freedom."

With the Freedom Climb, Operation Mobilization hopes to create a global movement of women who will rise up to be the voice for those who have no voice in order to see emancipation in high-risk communities, transforming the lives of women and children, breaking the cycle of poverty, and providing freedom from oppression and slavery.

The first facet is rescuing and restoring those that are being oppressed. The second aspect is prevention. OM's goal for 2012 is to impact 10,000 women and children worldwide by providing these solutions.