

United Nations Calls on Mauritania to Abolish Slavery

According to the newly released Global Slavery Index (GSI), there are nearly 30 million slaves in the world today.

The report rates countries on a couple of things: prevalence and numbers. Mauritania leads the world in prevalence, which means slavery is most common there. India has the most modern-day slaves, tipping the scale at approximately 14 million.

Last week, the United Nations called on Mauritania to abolish slavery. Slavery is technically outlawed in the nation, but enslaved people make up nearly 4 percent of the population there, according to the Global Slavery Index.

In fact, West Africa holds half of the 10 countries where slavery is found in greatest measure. One of the missions of Every Child Ministries (ECM) is to rescue shrine slaves in the region, says ECM co-founder Lorella Rouster.

“People argue over the precise definition of slavery,” says Rouster, “but in my opinion, this ritual servitude that we see in the shrines is absolutely a form of modern-day slavery.”

A Look at West African Slavery

While Mauritania tops the list, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Gambia and Gabon aren't far behind.

An estimated 40,000 children are trafficking victims in Benin, and more than 30,000 kids in Cote d'Ivoire are trapped in forced labor. The GSI says forced begging, child marriage, domestic servitude and forced prostitution, including child sex tourism, are the most prevalent forms of modern-day slavery in Gambia. In Gabon, girls are sold and traded for domestic servitude or sexual exploitation, while boys are

trafficked for labor.

ECM rescues shrine slaves in Ghana, Togo, Benin and small parts of Nigeria.

“The chains that hold the women and girls there are not physical chains,” Rouster explains. “They’re social, they’re psychological, and they’re spiritual. They hold them there just as effectively as if they actually were chained down to the floor.”

The gospel truth breaks those chains.

“We have found that the gospel can be the means by which they’re freed; it can really facilitate that,” Rouster says.

Freedom in Christ

ECM uses a variety of methods to free victims of ritual servitude and abuse.

“We have been successful in freeing some of them, while we are still struggling with others,” Rouster shares.

Though security reasons keep Rouster from elaborating, she says the gospel is central to their work.

“We are putting the gospel more at the forefront than we originally did,” she states.

ECM workers use every opportunity to share the truth of Christ with everyone they meet.

“That includes the priests and priestesses, and devotees and shrine owners—everyone that we come in contact with,” Rouster adds.

Though a relationship with Christ meets survivors’ spiritual needs, the whole person must be cared for. That’s where ECM’s appropriately named New Life Center comes in.

Through discipleship and counseling, those who are rescued experience healing and grow in their knowledge of Christ at the New Life Center. Through job skills training, girls rescued from shrine slavery are given the ability to start a new life.

“This is intended to be a rehab center to empower women and girls who were formerly in ritual servitude,” Rouster explains.

“Our No. 1 thing that we really need is prayer cover,” she says. “It’s not easy going, and we have faced many obstacles, many setbacks, many spiritual attacks.

“We’re hanging in there, and God has given us some powerful inroads to bring the gospel to people that have normally been overlooked in normal evangelistic efforts, like the priests and priestesses, and devotees of idols.”

Pray for perseverance for ECM workers. Pray that the testimonies of those who escape slavery will advance the gospel in West Africa.

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