

1

The Challenge

Understanding the World of New Slavery

It is just like a fisherman going to fish. . . . If he don't put out the bait, he can't get a fish. So they tell the parents a lovely story, you know, what [their children] will encounter when they come to the United States. But behold, when they get into the United States the picture is completely different.

LOUIS

Louis works for the phone company near Washington, D.C. He also frees slaves. When he got together with family and friends for the Thanksgiving holiday a few years ago, Louis did what everyone does—he got out his video camera. As he recorded the holiday gathering, he noticed something strange: in the large group of family and friends, one teenage girl always tried to hide when he turned on the camera.

And I asked myself, you know, what's wrong with the young lady? At first I asked her, where do you come from? She told me she was visiting from Indiana. That is, she was staying with my cousin there. But something stuck in my mind.

Louis had visited his cousin in Indiana several times and didn't remember ever meeting this young woman. Driving home from the party, he asked his wife what she knew about the girl. His wife had heard that the girl had eloped and was now hiding with their cousin. Yet this seemed a little odd as well, because normally a girl seeking refuge would look first to her own family.

Louis had come to the United States from Cameroon, West Africa, in 1985 and eventually became a U.S. citizen. With a degree in management

from an American university, he had a good job and served as an elder in his Presbyterian church. Living in the suburbs in Virginia, Louis and his family were pursuing the middle-class dream of stability and security. By his late forties, Louis had achieved much of his dream. But he found himself deeply unsettled by this strange and troubled girl in the middle of his family's Thanksgiving holiday. Things just weren't adding up, so a few days later he drove over to visit a relative, where the young woman was staying.

And then she began to tell me the story. And I felt so bad about it. . . . I mean everyone has a human feeling, if you hear a story which is so terrible, you are moved, being human. I began to put down in writing the stories she told me, and probably if you read the whole report that I wrote, you would come to the conclusion that something was really, really wrong.

The more Louis heard, the more sickened he became. There was no elopement in this girl's past. He listened as, confused, isolated, and still in shock, she painfully recounted years of slavery in the suburbs of Washington, D.C.

Her name was Rose. Back in Cameroon, at the age of fourteen, she had just begun her school's summer vacation when a friend of her aunt stopped by her house. This woman explained that a Cameroonian family in the United States needed someone to help around the house. In exchange, the family would help Rose go to school in America. It sounded like a great opportunity to Rose and to her parents. They talked it over carefully and agreed that she could go right away. Since the summer vacation had just begun, she would have time to settle in before starting school in the United States. Away from her parents, Rose was introduced to the family she would be working for. They bought her air ticket and escorted her through customs and immigration, passing her off as one of their family when they reached the United States. Everything seemed normal until they reached Rose's new home in America. Then the trap closed.

The husband and wife showed Rose the jobs they wanted her to do. Soon the jobs filled her day completely, rapidly taking control of her life. Up at six in the morning, Rose had to work until long past midnight. When she began to question her treatment, the beatings began. "They used to hit me," Rose said. "I couldn't go for three days without them beating me up." The smallest accident would lead to violence. "Sometimes I might spill a drink on the floor by mistake. They would hit me for

that,” she said.¹ In a strange country, locked up in a strange house far from home, Rose was cut off from help. If she tried to use the phone, she was beaten; if she tried to write a letter, it was taken away from her. “It was just like she was lost in the middle of a forest,” said Louis; “she was completely isolated.”

Under the complete control of others, subject to physical abuse, paid nothing, working all hours, this fourteen-year-old schoolgirl had become a slave. The promise that she could go to school in America was just the bait used to hook her. In Cameroon her parents received no word from her, only occasional reassuring messages from the family who had enslaved their daughter. The beatings and constant verbal attacks broke Rose’s will, and her life dissolved into a blur of pain, exhaustion, work, abuse, and fear. Rose lived in slavery for two and a half years.

Someday we may know the details of what happened in these years, but probably not. Until recently Rose was often nervous and withdrawn, still suffering from the trauma of her enslavement. Demonstrating remarkable resilience, she has moved on to a new life, and it would be understandable if she never wants to revisit that period of unspeakable pain. Her mind has deeply buried her memories. What we do know is that not long after she had turned eighteen, Rose was found trying to talk to a neighbor by the woman who controlled her. Dragging her away, “the woman started yelling at me, started cursing me,” Rose explains, “and I couldn’t take it anymore. I just had to run away.” Later that day she ran to the home of a friend of her “employer.” She pleaded for help, but this woman called the family who had enslaved her. When Rose realized the betrayal, she ran again, this time to the parking lot of a nearby K-Mart. Her only hope was a Cameroon man she had met in her employers’ home. He had seemed nice, and she had learned his phone number. Begging change from a stranger to make a phone call, she managed to leave a message for the man, asking him to pick her up. Without a coat, with no other place to go in the cold November night, she waited in the parking lot outside a store. Four hours later, at nearly 11:00 P.M., she was picked up and taken home to the man’s family. This man was Louis’s cousin.

Although in safety, Rose was still in limbo. The family she was staying with simply did not know what to do with her, and she feared that in time her “employers” would try to take her back. Then came Thanksgiving and the meeting with Louis. As Louis gently drew out Rose’s story, he was shocked and saddened:

I felt terrible, I mean, I felt really terrible, because I couldn't imagine, not even in my slightest imagination, that in this day and age someone would treat somebody's child the way she was treated. It made me sick in my stomach.

Soon Louis took Rose to stay with his own family, and as she opened up to him, more shocking facts came tumbling out. It occurred to Louis to ask Rose if she knew any more girls in the same situation. "Oh, yes," she replied. Following up on what Rose could remember, he found two more young women in slavery, and by himself, with real daring, he liberated them. One of them, Christy, had been brought to the United States at seventeen and had spent five years as a domestic slave. Sally had been brought at age fifteen and had spent three years in bondage.² Now Louis had three young women staying with his family, with their care and support coming from his own pocket. His first job, he decided, was to reassure the women's families, so he took videos of all three relaying messages to their families and then traveled to Cameroon. He showed the video footage to the girls' families, who were shocked but overjoyed, as Louis explains:

They were very happy to see me, and especially the fact that I took the video of their children, they were extremely happy, because even if they now saw what their daughters had gone through, at least they had firsthand information from their children. I felt good about it because it was like a conclusion to me that I had done the right thing. I could see their faces, and I could see that they realized at least that someone was concerned about the lives of their children.

More than a year before, Sally's family had been told that their daughter had died in America, and their emotions at seeing her alive are hard to imagine. Meanwhile Louis was investigating the connections that had smuggled the girls into the United States. He found a network that recruited girls from poor families by promising education and jobs. One woman provided a house where the girls were taken after leaving their families and were prepared for the trip to America. Some respected members of the Cameroonian community in the United States were involved, and Louis began to understand that he was up against something big.

With the help of lawyers from an organization called CASA Maryland, the girls' "employers" have now been prosecuted in both criminal and civil courts. Rose bravely went through the ordeal of being

cross-examined and having her slavery and abuse exposed in open court. The trial resulted in a conviction, and the couple who enslaved her were sentenced to nine years in prison and ordered to pay her \$100,000 in restitution. Of course, being awarded restitution and actually getting it are two different things, and Rose will probably never see the money. She'll also never see her parents again; they both died in 2002.

Christy's "employers" got five years in prison and were ordered to pay \$180,000 in back wages. So far, Christy has received about \$2,000. She and Rose live together now, sharing an apartment in the Washington, D.C., area. Both are working as nursing assistants and dream of being nurses. For the moment they can't afford to go to college, because much of what they earn is sent back to Cameroon to support their families. Christy's remittances are building a house for her parents and are paying the school fees of her younger brothers and sisters.³ Louis supported the three girls as long as they needed help. Although he slowly used up his savings, he is convinced that he did the right thing. "People treat dogs better than these girls were treated," he told me. "Anyone who cares about other people would do what I did."

If the story of these young women were unique, it would be shocking enough. That there are slaves in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., the capital of the land of the free, might cause us to question our assumptions about this country. Our questions become more troubling when we face the fact that Rose's story is one of many such tales in the Washington, D.C., area, and one of thousands in the United States. The U.S. Department of State estimates that as many as 17,500 people are brought into the country *each year* and forced into agricultural work, prostitution, domestic service, or sweatshop labor. These are not poorly paid migrant workers; these people are slaves. According to conservative estimates, there are tens of thousands of slaves in America today.⁴ And the thousands in the United States and other developed countries are just a fraction of the total across the globe. The estimated twenty-seven million slaves in the world today equals more than twice the number of people taken from Africa during the 350 years of the Atlantic slave trade.⁵ But given that legal slavery no longer exists, how can we call these people *slaves*?

WHAT MAKES A SLAVE?

Slavery has been with us since the beginning of human history. When people began to congregate in Mesopotamia and make the first towns

around 6800 B.C., they built strong external walls around their towns, suggesting the occurrence of raiding and war. We find the first depiction of slavery in clay drawings that survive from 4000 B.C.; the drawings show captives of battle being tied, whipped, and forced to work by the Sumerians. Papyrus scrolls from 2100 B.C. record the ownership of slaves by private citizens in Egypt and list the first documented price of a slave: eleven silver shekels. When money began to be used, slave trading became a way of making a living, and we see records showing slave-raiding expeditions from Egypt capturing 1,554 slaves in Syria in one season. Around 1790 B.C., the first written laws introduced the legal status and worth of slaves. These Babylonian law codes clearly stated that slaves are worth less than “real people,” a principle that is repeated for the next four thousand years. The ancient code is gruesomely clear: a physician making a fatal mistake on a patient, for example, is ordered to have his hands cut off, unless the patient is a slave, in which case he only has to replace the slave.

In past centuries, people had no problem understanding who was a slave and who wasn't, even given the existence of temporary enslavement. Slaves then and now share one central condition: violence is freely used to control them or punish them. The Babylonian code again: “If a slave strike a free man, his ear shall be cut off”; and the Louisiana Slave Code of 1724: “The slave who will have struck his master, his mistress, the husband of his mistress, or their children, either in the face or resulting in a bruise or the outpouring of blood, will be punished by death.” For nearly four thousand years the right to inflict violence on a slave was enshrined in law. When the legal ownership of humans ended, as it did in the United States in 1865, many people thought that slavery had ended as well.

But even when people in the United States no longer owned slaves legally, they often continued to control them—by restricting their housing and food supply, refusing them education, limiting their movements, and threatening them with violence. This fact does not diminish the great achievements of the abolitionists and the slaves who fought for their freedom; if there are tens of thousands of slaves in the United States today, it is worth remembering that there were once four million. Still, no matter how many laws were passed against it, *de facto* slavery never stopped. Throughout history, slavery has meant taking total control of a person and exploiting that person's labor. The essence of slavery is neither legal ownership nor the business of selling people; the essence of slavery is controlling people through violence and using them to make

money. Before laws gave one person the right to own another person, even before the invention of money as a means of exchange, slavery was part of human life. Today the laws allowing slavery have been repealed, but people around the world are still brutalized and broken and reduced to slavery through violence. Their free will is taken away. Their labor, their minds, and their lives are consumed by someone else's greed. Slavery, at its most fundamental, has just three elements: control through violence, economic exploitation, and the loss of free will. Slavery is not about race, color, or ownership. Any one or all of these may be used to justify slavery, but they are not essential for its existence.

If people are not legally recorded as being slaves, how can we really call them slaves? The answer is relatively simple, though as with most human conditions, there are always cases that defy clear definition. We can start by asking, Can this person walk away from the situation without fear of violence? If the answer is no, if the person is beaten when trying to leave, then you have one indication of slavery. Another question we can ask: is this person paid nothing, or at a level that barely keeps the person alive from one day to the next? Look again at Rose. She couldn't leave because of the threat of violence, she was paid nothing, she was given only enough food to keep her alive, and she was economically exploited. Her ability to exercise free will was taken from her. Rose was a slave. The newspapers might have called her condition "virtual slavery," or said she lived in "slavelike" conditions, but make no mistake: like women in bondage in ancient Babylonia or the antebellum American South, Rose was a slave.

Slavery is also not a matter of duration. The fact that Rose spent "only" two and a half years in bondage does not make her any less a slave. Slavery isn't necessarily a permanent condition. That was never the case, even when slavery was legal. The ancient Babylonian law and the Louisiana Slave Code both allowed for temporary enslavement. For thousands of years people have been captured, snared, coerced, tricked, sold, kidnapped, drugged, arrested, swindled, seduced, assaulted, or brutalized into slavery. A fortunate few have then managed to make their way out again through any number of exits. Some were released when their health and strength broke down and they were no longer useful. Some managed to escape after decades, and others after just weeks. For some families of slaves, it took generations. On rare occasions a master would free a slave as a gift, but that did not change the fact that the person had been a slave. The same is true today.

We have to put behind us the picture of slavery most of us hold in our

minds, that of slavery in the antebellum South. Contemporary slavery shares with the slavery of the past the essentials of violence and exploitation, but today it is not a legal institution, a key part of any country's economy, or a relationship crucially dependent on race or ethnicity. Today, as in the past, slavery exists in many different forms around the world. But modern slavery has two key characteristics that make it very different from slavery of the past: slaves today are cheap, and they are disposable.

A CATASTROPHIC FALL IN PRICE

This new variant of slavery arrived with the twenty-first century. Today slaves are cheaper than they have ever been. The enslaved fieldworker who cost the equivalent of \$40,000 in 1850 costs less than \$100 today. This dramatic fall in price has forever altered the basic economic equation of slavery. When the price of any commodity drops radically, the balance of supply and demand is fundamentally changed. Today there is a glut of potential slaves on the market. That means they cost very little but can generate high returns, since their ability to work has not fallen with their price. The return to be made on slaves in 1850 Alabama averaged around 5 percent. Today returns from slavery start in the double figures and range as high as 800 percent. Even when they are used in the most basic kinds of work, slaves can make back their purchase price (however that acquisition occurred) very quickly.

Slaves were far more costly in the past. Although finding a clear equivalent between modern dollars and the currency used in ancient Babylonia or Rome is impossible, we can look at how much slaves cost in terms of things that don't change very much over time. An understanding of slave prices from the past is based on three measures: the value of land, the annual wages paid to a free agricultural worker, and the price of oxen. For all of human history (and still today), people have maintained records of the price of land and the cost of keeping a worker in the fields. And for thousands of years, until the Industrial Revolution, oxen were used as a power source to get food out of the ground and onto the table. (When you read *oxen*, think *tractor*. Today an American farmer may pay upward of \$100,000 for a tractor; in the past oxen were expensive.) For the price of three or four oxen, a farmer could buy a productive field big enough to support a family and then some, or pay the annual salaries of two or three agricultural workers. Three or four oxen were a big capital investment. Yet, on average, they were worth the price

of only one healthy slave. Or consider that for the price of one slave in the Deep South in the 1850s, a person could buy 120 acres of good farmland. It should not be any surprise that slaves were expensive; after all, slaveholders were buying the complete productive capacity of a human being, all the work they could squeeze out for as long as they could keep the slave alive.

In India today you can still buy slaves as well as farmland and oxen, which remain the essential “tractors” that keep farms going. But when we compare the price of a slave to the modern prices of land, labor, or oxen in India, the slave costs, on average, 95 percent less than in the past. This precipitous collapse, unprecedented in all of human history, has dire consequences for slaves.⁶ If you could buy a fully equipped, brand new car for \$40, do you think your relationship to your car would change? If your car were that cheap, you would begin to treat it as something to be used and then discarded. Why even fix a flat tire if the whole car costs less than the repair? Most slaveholders feel that way about slaves today.

The inexpensiveness of slaves is good for the slaveholder and great for the bottom line but disastrous for slaves. A low purchase price means that a slave does not represent a large investment requiring special care; the slave is easily replaced. Slaves today are treated like cheap plastic ballpoint pens, the kind we all have in our desk drawers or pockets. No one worries about the care and maintenance of these pens or about keeping a careful record of their whereabouts. No one files a deed of ownership for these pens or sends out a search party if one goes missing. No one takes out insurance on these pens. These pens are disposable, and, because they are so cheap, so are slaves.

If slaves get ill, are injured, outlive their usefulness, or become troublesome to the slaveholder, they are dumped—or worse. The young woman enslaved as a prostitute in Thailand is thrown out on the street when she tests positive for HIV. The Brazilian man tricked and trapped into slavery making charcoal is tossed out when the forest is razed and no trees are left to cut. The boy in India who spends all day rolling bidi cigarettes is dumped or sent back to his family if he is injured or ill, and the slaveholder will try to take another child in his place. The young woman in “ritual slavery” in Ghana, who has been exploited, sexually abused, and impregnated again and again by a *trokosi* priest, will be sent back to her parents when the priest tires of her or her health breaks down. Enslaved domestic workers around the world will be discarded when their “family” moves to another city or country. Like plastic pens

or paper cups, slaves and potential slaves are so numerous that they can simply be used up and thrown away. Rose, for example, was fairly expensive as slaves go today, yet her slaveholders paid nothing for her. Her acquisition cost involved only the time needed to spin a web of lies to her and her parents and the expense of bringing her to America.

WHERE DO ALL THESE SLAVES COME FROM?

How do we explain a world in which twenty-seven million people are in slavery? Where did all these slaves come from? And how did these people become enslaved? Basically, three factors that converged after World War II gave birth to the resurgence of slavery. The first factor is the world population explosion. After 1945 the world population grew like never before in human history. This growth was the product of many positive developments: the control of infectious diseases, better health care for children, and a prosperity that provided sustenance for the coming billions. World population exploded from two billion to over six billion in about fifty years, with most of this growth occurring in the developing world. Figure 1 plots world population growth along with the fall in the prices of slaves. What becomes clear is that the population explosion helped create a glut of potential slaves flooding the market and leading to a crash in prices.

Population growth helps to explain the drop in prices, but it doesn't necessarily explain the growth in numbers of slaves. Simply having a lot of people doesn't make them into slaves; other things had to happen to lead them or force them into slavery.

The second factor pushing these growing millions toward slavery is a collection of dramatic social and economic changes, many of which were supposed to make those people's lives better. Like the world population, the global economy boomed after 1945. As colonies in the developing world gained their independence, many of the new countries opened up to Western businesses. In the 1950s people remarked on the spread of Ford cars and Coca-Cola all over the world; by the 1960s the rapid economic changes in the developing world were seen as commonplace; by the 1990s no one thought it surprising that teenagers in India, Malaysia, or the Ukraine were eating the same McDonald's hamburgers and humming the same tunes from MTV as teenagers in Chicago, Tokyo, or London. As the economy became global and grew exponentially, its benefits were shared in many parts of the world. But other parts of the world did not take part in that growth. Whole pop-



(Numbers along the left side are both human population in billions and the slave price index.)

Figure 1. World population and the price of slaves, 2000 B.C. to A.D. 2004. The Y-axis represents both the global population in billions and the Slave Price Index, which is composed of equivalency measures for oxen, land, or agricultural wages and which varies from 0 to 8. The irregularity of the years along the X-axis is due to the lack of any regular data on slave prices; the years given reflect those years in which slave price information can be obtained.

ulations were left behind, stuck in the subsistence poverty of the past, or worse.

Poverty is often thought of as having two levels, though this is just a rough guideline. At the bottom level are more than one billion people who live on \$1 a day or less. All these people are living in the developing world, and for the most part, they are living outside towns and cities living out the same hand-to-mouth existence that was the rule for most of human history. What does it mean to be this poor? It means you are always hungry and that access to medical care and education for your children is pretty much out of the question. It means you are unlikely to have the basic needs of life: clean water, a roof to keep out the rain, adequate clothing, or even a pair of shoes.

This is life without options. Every action must be aimed at day-to-day survival, and even that survival is not assured. Desperation is the norm, and families are ready to do anything to survive. These families are found

especially in rural South Asia and rural Africa, areas where slavery thrives. Later in this book you will meet families in India who are trying to live on forty cents a day. These are families whose children are regularly harvested into slavery.

One step up from this extreme poverty, again as a guideline, are families living on approximately \$1 to \$2 a day, a level that is sometimes called “moderate poverty.”⁷ Many of these families are living in the vast shantytowns that surround the major cities of the developing world. For example, Mexico City has a population of twenty million, and about half of the residents live in shacks and lean-tos of cardboard and scrap wood that lack basic amenities. Many of these families are economic refugees from rural areas where family farms have been converted into plantations growing cash crops for export. Their lives as subsistence farmers, based around the village and church, were shattered when they were dispossessed of the land they had worked, often for generations. Searching for jobs, they migrated to the city, only to find themselves competing with millions of other campesinos. In the shantytown they have lost the neighbors, the church, and the customs of the rural village. Criminal gangs control much of the shantytown areas. The government has little time or attention to give these poor and disenfranchised people, relegating them to second-class status. This pattern is repeated across the developing world, and the result, whether in Rio, New Delhi, Manila, or Bangkok, is extreme vulnerability. The police do not protect you, the law is not your shield, you can’t buy your way out of problems, and any weapon you have is no match for those of the gangs and the police.

In fact, if we compare the level of poverty and the amount of slavery for 193 of the world’s countries, the pattern is obvious.⁸ The poorest countries have the highest levels of slavery. The relationship would be exact except for the effects of global human trafficking in which the vulnerable are enslaved and transported from poor countries to rich ones, with the result that the richest countries have significant pockets of slavery.

This link between poverty and slavery holds almost any way you measure it. For example, the United Nations has classified thirty-eight countries of the world as being “high-debt countries,” which means that these countries are carrying a crippling load of debt owed to international lenders. A high-debt country has to use what little income or taxes it can gather to service debt rather than to invest in its own people. This is often called a *debt overhang*. Debt from the past bears down on a country, paralyzing it and preventing any growth in the future.⁹ The

types of investments a high-debt country is *not* able to make—schools, law enforcement, economic growth, and so on—are exactly the ones that are most likely to reduce the amount of slavery. If you look across all the countries in the world, those with the largest amount of debt overhang also have some of the highest levels of slavery.¹⁰

One of these poor countries is Cameroon, where Rose came from. Cameroon has all the usual markers for serious poverty: half the population is poor, the economy carries a high debt load, infant mortality is high, HIV/AIDS is rampant, and life expectancy is around fifty years and falling. This level of poverty creates many hardships, but just having a very large number of poor people still doesn't make those people slaves. Rapid population growth and the impoverishing impact of globalization, epidemics, natural disasters, war and civil conflict, kleptocratic governments, and the international arms trade all support the emergence of slavery but do not cause it. To turn the poor into slaves requires violence, and violence needs the right conditions to grow unchecked.

ON THE TAKE

Corruption, especially police corruption, is the third force that drives the growth of slavery. For slavery to exist, the slaveholder must be able to keep the slave where the law can't protect them. Rose, enslaved in the United States, had to be isolated and locked up. But in many parts of the world, a simple payment to the local police allows a slaveholder to use violence without fear of arrest. Sometimes the police themselves will provide violence for an extra fee. When governments fail to protect their citizens and to maintain the rule of law, those citizens can become slaves. And because slavery is now illegal everywhere, the complicity of crooked police is a fundamental requirement for slavery to take root. In Western Europe, Canada, and the United States, slavery happens *in spite of* the efforts of the police, but in many countries slavery flourishes *because of* the work of the police. Almost everywhere you find slavery in the developing world, you find police or government officials on the take, turning a blind eye.

It is not difficult to understand the pressure on police to join forces with the slaveholders. If a police officer's salary is \$10 or \$20 a month, the opportunity to bring in an extra \$100 a month is the difference between poverty and being able to feed a family, send the children to school, and have electricity. Taking the bribe is even easier when the police officer is urged to do so by the boss. Landlords, moneylenders, and businesspeople,

the solid citizens of the town or village, are likely to use slavery in their businesses. Does a policeman really want to jeopardize his job, put his family at risk, and alienate the most powerful members of his local community just to protect people no one seems to care about? Since the enslaved are often migrants from somewhere else, or members of a lower caste, lower class, or different ethnic or religious group, serving their interests will offer few rewards and carry many penalties. Again, if you examine most of the world's countries in a systematic way, you find a strong relationship between slavery and corruption.¹¹

The pattern is strong and clear: more corruption means more slavery. This is a special challenge when corruption becomes institutionalized. The bribes pass up the chain of command and into the hands of politicians and government officials. Soon law enforcement is dedicated to protecting systematic law violation. In Thailand, for example, lucrative police commands are sold to the highest bidder, and the regular payments from slaveholders join the flow of money from other criminals into the pockets of police and government officials. Russia is now a major exporter of trafficked women; in Moscow a single monthly payment providing protection from government taxes, police investigation, fire, theft, vandalism, safety inspections, and parking tickets is deposited directly into a U.S. bank account.¹² The size of the payment depends on the size of the business and whether or not it is legal. The bribes required for smuggling drugs or people are high, but then these crimes make huge profits.

If this sort of corruption is widespread, the national government faces an enormous task. Pakistan, for example, enacted a strong law against debt bondage slavery in 1988 and revised it in 1992, but in spite of a large number of cases coming to light, not a single offender has been convicted. The enslaved may be freed, usually through the actions of human rights organizations, but because of corruption the slaveholders are never punished. Instead, the ex-slaves and their liberators are at great risk of violent retaliation and persecution.¹³ More than twenty-five years ago India enacted an excellent law against debt bondage slavery, setting a three-year prison sentence and a fine for anyone convicted of forcing someone into, or keeping them in, bondage. To my knowledge, of the hundreds of cases prosecuted, no convicted slaveholder has ever served prison time. Today fines of just 100 rupees (less than \$2) are common for those convicted, making a mockery of the law. The linchpin of slavery in many countries is government indifference or, worse, complicity. When corruption is widespread, governments must do more than just pass

tough laws; they must also root out corruption and give protection to those who have come out of slavery. At international meetings, many countries make statements of heartfelt concern for the enslaved, only to forget about them as soon as their representatives return home. In any event, slaves are voiceless, and unless they have powerful friends, their cause is forgotten.

WELL, THAT SHOULD BE EASY

When we look at all the elements that support slavery around the world, things seem a little discouraging. Apparently all we have to do is end world poverty, eradicate corruption, keep people from being greedy, slow the population explosion, halt environmental destruction and armed conflicts that impoverish countries, convince the big lenders to cancel international debts, and get governments to keep the promises they make every time they pass a law. How tough is that?

The good news is that we don't have to do all these things at once, and we don't have to solve all of these problems before we can end slavery. There are millions of slaves who can be freed *today*; we just have to change the situation in their lives and communities. Some slaves are ready to come to freedom now; others need big systemic changes to occur, if not completely then enough to open the door to their freedom. There are practical solutions to nearly all of these problems (though I'm not so clear about how to keep people from being greedy). Some are tougher than others. Seemingly intractable problems like corruption can take time to fix, but they too have remedies. Remember that a hundred years ago the United States would have scored high on any corruption scale. When was the last time you had to bribe a police officer to be able to park your car or get your trash picked up? United Nations programs have shown that with the right resources and leadership a culture of corruption can be cracked, and citizens can stop assuming that every interaction with an official requires a payoff.

International debts are being cancelled. The population explosion is slowing down. The struggle against environmental destruction has never been so fierce. The number of people living in extreme poverty has actually fallen from 1.5 billion in 1981 to 1.1 billion in 2001, even as the world's population continued to increase. There are clear plans to significantly reduce extreme poverty by 2015 and then end it by 2025.¹⁴ Governments can be encouraged to enforce their own laws in a number of ways, some involving carrots and some involving sticks. Stopping

armed conflict is going to be tough, but if poverty and corruption are reduced and good governance is increased, the likelihood of conflict also falls.

Many changes in the world are heading in the right direction for the eradication of slavery, but we must provide the brainpower and the economic muscle to make it happen. We also need a plan. The pages ahead offer a preliminary plan for moving the world from slavery to freedom. It is not a foolproof or complete plan—there are still unclear areas we will need to fill in as we go along. If we want to end global slavery, we have to improve our understanding of it and locate its weak points. No all-encompassing plan will stop slavery in every country or village, and we must find the right combination of solutions for each situation. But we know that in the United States, Ghana, India, Pakistan, Italy, Brazil, Japan, and a host of other countries, slaves are being liberated. Every time a slave comes to freedom, we learn another lesson about how slavery can end.