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ALUMNAE ON OUR RADAR

*Christina
Bain '00
combats the
global atrocity
of human
trafficking*

Freedom
fighter

Photographs by Jessica Scranton



Human trafficking is often described as modern-day slavery. It applies to any person or groups of people forced into servitude for sexual, labor, or other reasons. As program administrator of the Initiative to

Stop Human Trafficking at the Harvard Kennedy School Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Christina Bain '00 is doing her part to put an end to the atrocity.

Bain, whose background is in government and coalition organizing, has directed the initiative since it was launched in 2008. "I started with the Initiative to Stop Human Trafficking, and have crafted it from the ground up," she says. "I handle everything and anything to do with the program: fundraising, event planning, student advising, faculty recruitment, managing a fellowship program for leading scholars and practitioners, and developing research, which is one of the biggest needs of the field right now."

She's particularly excited about a series of online conferences she developed, which have already trained hundreds of people worldwide—anti-trafficking activists, academics, students, policymakers, and government leaders—on the most effective ways to combat human trafficking. Here, Bain gives an overview of the issue of trafficking and how each of us can help wipe out this international human rights crisis.

Explain the term "human trafficking."

The underlying crime of human trafficking is slavery: subjugation through violence, sexual abuse, and/or the denial of all free will. Human trafficking

is defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act as "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion." A victim need not be physically transported from one location to another in order for the crime to be defined as human trafficking.

How does sex trafficking fit in?

Sex trafficking is a subcategory of human trafficking. Another subcategory is labor trafficking, which includes those forced into domestic servitude, sweatshops, agriculture, and other industries.

What is the current status of the problem?

According to the International Labor Organization, there are currently at least 12.3 million adults and children worldwide in forced labor, bonded labor, and commercial sexual servitude. Because of the nature of the crime, it is a difficult and complex issue to measure accurately.

Has the downturn in the economy had any effect on human trafficking?

The economic crisis has created an increased demand for cheaper goods and services. Because employers are facing credit issues and late or non-payments, workers are further exploited and may be subjected to worsening conditions.

What implications does trafficking have for those who aren't directly involved?

Human trafficking affects us all, whether it is from the goods we buy every day in terms of fair labor practices or in terms of a growing global-health concern, such as the increasing spread

of HIV/AIDS among sex-trafficking victims and their abusers.

What effect has the Internet had?

The Internet has created a virtual world for trading goods and people. All a trafficker needs now is a cell phone and the Internet and, boom, here is a business.

How is your program fighting human trafficking?

The Initiative to Stop Human Trafficking tackles human trafficking through building a network of scholars and practitioners, developing best practices, disseminating information, and conducting research. The initiative seeks to not only provide academic teaching but also professional training on effective tools for combating human trafficking, as well as communication of research and best practices to a global community.

What can the average person do to help?

Look at your own community, your own neighborhood. It does not matter whether you live in a suburb or city environment—trafficking has no bounds. Just telling your family, friends, and colleagues about this issue helps the movement in terms of raising awareness. If you want to go one step further, look at what local organizations are doing to assist in anti-trafficking causes. These could be large or small organizations. Don't reinvent the wheel, but see where your own talents and strengths can fit into the greater cause.

—Christina Barber-Just

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