

Ending Human Trafficking: A Jewish Statement of Values

This year we are slaves; next year, may we be free. (Passover Haggadah)

*No one should be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all forms.
(Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 4)*

The Jewish story is one of both slavery and redemption. Every year, we recount the Exodus, the journey of our ancestors from bondage to freedom. This retelling forms the core of Jewish empathy for the most vulnerable, and our moral imperative to uphold the right of every individual to be free. Even though forced labor is illegal, the United States continues to grapple with the reality of human trafficking — modern-day slavery — at home and abroad. No industry is immune to the scourge of human trafficking, and even state-sponsored “guest worker” programs have been found rife with abuse and cases of forced labor. While trafficking happens in all 50 states, survivors often find themselves locked up in the criminal justice system and isolated from the support they need.

As the Jewish community prepares to work with the new Congress and administration to combat human trafficking — including the 2017 Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act — these will be our guiding values. We hope you will work with us in making them a reality.

1. Every human being is deserving of respect and dignity.

We believe that each and every one of us is made in the image of G-d — *B'tselem Elohim*. All workers in all jobs, whether American citizens, foreign nationals, or stateless people, must be treated with dignity and respect, and protected from unsafe and exploitative working conditions.

2. Every human being has the right to make their own decision about their body, life, and future.

Bodily autonomy and self-determination are sacred. No one should be forced to work or engage in a sex act against their will. Survivors of human trafficking should not be penalized for decisions they made that resulted in them falling prey to traffickers.

3. The fight to end human trafficking must be rooted in both justice (*tzedeck*) and compassion (*chesed*).

We must commit to adequately funding services for survivors of trafficking, including shelter, mental health and trauma services, job and financial literacy training, and ongoing support for material needs as they rebuild their lives. These services must be available to survivors regardless of race, age, immigration status, ability, sexual orientation, gender or gender identity.

4. Survivors of trafficking are the experts of their own experience.

In order to create survivor-centered services and policies, our advocacy must be survivor-led. In order to prioritize the leadership and expertise of trafficking survivors, we must place their needs and experiences at the core of our work.

5. Survivors of trafficking are not criminals.

Survivors of sex trafficking are often arrested, convicted, and incarcerated on charges of prostitution, or held accountable for crimes committed while they were being trafficked. We must treat these survivors with care, not criminalization. Undocumented survivors of human trafficking are blindly targeted for deportation, often without regard for the crimes committed against them. Undocumented survivors must be treated with justice by law enforcement.

6. We must address the root causes of trafficking in the United States.

The reality of poverty in our communities and our lack of social safety nets, including severe deficiencies in our child welfare system, puts our youth at risk. Additionally, migrant and low wage workers are vulnerable. The lack of transparency, oversight, and enforcement of existing protections for workers in our myriad nonimmigrant visa categories leaves people at risk of being exploited. While prosecution of traffickers is important — we must hold people accountable for their crimes — addressing the systemic causes of the problem is the only way to end trafficking in the long term, both in the United States and abroad.

7. We must dismantle our culture of sexual violence and objectification.

Sex trafficking happens in the context of our society. Too often, we are willing to accept messages and behaviors that reinforce sexual violence and objectification. Ending sexual exploitation will require culture change in our homes and communities.

8. We must commit to changing the dynamics of an economic system where the constant demand for cheap goods and cheap labor directly contributes to modern-day slavery.

Forced labor happens in the context of a global market place where major corporations drive down the price paid to suppliers, who then cut costs by gutting wages and worker safety. We must support the only proven method for preventing slavery in supply chains, which is a worker-driven social responsibility model. This includes workers at the head of the table, clear mechanisms for workers to speak up and exercise their rights without fear of retaliation, comprehensive and independent monitoring, binding enforcement mechanisms, workplace specific codes of conduct developed by the workers themselves, market consequences for human rights violations, and corporate accountability for worker exploitation.

We are hopeful that you will work with us to build a world where all are free.

Sincerely,

Congregation Kehilat Shalom (New Jersey)
Fair Trade Judaica
Habonim Dror North America
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization
of America, Inc.
Hebrew Senior Life at NewBridge on the
Charles (Massachusetts)
Jewish Community Action (Minnesota)
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jewish Council on Urban Affairs (Illinois)
Jewish Federations of North America
Jewish Labor Committee
Jewish Women's Foundation of New York
Jewish Women International
JLens Investor Network
Keshet
Malibu Jewish Center and Synagogue
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Mayim Rabim Congregation (Minnesota)
Women's League for Conservative Judaism
Women of Reform Judaism
National Council of Jewish Women
Rabbinical Assembly
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College/Jewish
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Right Now: Advocates for African Asylum
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Temple Hillel B'nai Torah (Massachusetts)
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Union for Reform Judaism
Uri L'Tzedek
West End Synagogue (New York)
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