

## 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 works with Congress and the administration to combat human trafficking — including reauthorizing the Trafficking Victims Protection Act — these are our guiding values. We hope you will work with us in making them a reality.**

**1. Every human being deserves 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 (*tzedeq*) 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

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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 justly 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 of being trafficked. Additionally, migrant and low wage workers are vulnerable to traffickers. The lack of transparency, oversight, and enforcement of existing protections for workers in our myriad nonimmigrant visa categories leaves individuals at risk of exploitation. While prosecution of traffickers is important — we must hold individuals 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 within the context of our society. Too often, we accept messages and behaviors that reinforce sexual violence and objectification. Ending sexual exploitation requires 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 within the context of a global marketplace where the demand for cheap goods leads major corporations to 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.

**9. The White House and government agencies must continue to prioritize anti-trafficking efforts.**

The government's response to combating human trafficking has been remarkable over the last decade. Indeed, we have seen more than a 50 percent increase in funding for key US government agencies for combating human trafficking as well as substantial improvements in US government anti-trafficking programming. Attempts to shrink the federal government through downsizing agencies and/or de-funding programs that serve survivors and their families must continue to be supported, fully funded, and completely implemented.

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

Sincerely,

National Council of Jewish Women  
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights