



Fifty Years Post Segregation: Modern Day Slavery, Human Rights and the Call to Action for this Generation

#MayorsCare Summit on

Modern Slavery and Climate Change: The Commitment of the Cities

New Synod Hall, 21 July 2015

William A. Bell – Mayor of Birmingham, Alabama

Thank you, His Excellency. In particular I would like to recognize the US Ambassador to the Holy See, Ambassador Hackett, who is present with us, and to all of my fellow Mayors, I am honoured to be a part of this auspicious occasion.

At the time of my birth I was born into a society in Birmingham, Alabama, that existed under the close cousin of slavery, called segregation. Segregation was designed to exploit individuals in groups based on race and race alone. It was for the economic purpose of cheap labour, it was to control society and to control human beings. But because, as Madam Archer said this morning, good men and good women of goodwill came together, segregation was ended. Now it is the time for us to heed the clarion call of Pope Francis to work together to end the universal suffering of individuals who are victimized by human trafficking.

As an ambassador to the organization called "Human Rights First", we are dedicated to work not only within the United States but internationally with other organizations to end this travesty among God's children. We have made a lot of progress in combating trafficking both in the United States and abroad over the past 15 years, but we are still a long way to go. The US signed Trafficking Victims Protection Act into law in 2000, which created our framework for fighting trafficking both within the US and overseas. Alabama adopted its first anti-trafficking law in 2010 and all 50 US States have laws to address trafficking as of 2012. Despite increased efforts to combat slavery in the US and globally, it continues to be the fastest growing crime, globally enslaving an estimated 21 million victims worldwide and earning 150 billion dollars in illicit profits annually. The State Department reported that there were just 5,776 convictions worldwide last year, and only 174 in the United States, which tells us this crime is of low risk and high reward for its perpetrators. There need to be increased efforts to dismantle the business of trafficking by reversing this risk-reward equation; in particular, we need to increase prosecution in the United States and around the globe. This will require a comprehensive multi-sector approach that establishes new partnerships to share data and best practices, and to expand the capacity of law enforcement. In addition, there must be new energy and partnerships developed between law enforcement, governments, businesses and civil society to bring perpetrators' profits down, and ensure legitimate businesses and government are not knowingly or unwittingly supporting the crime by having slave labor in the supply chains of their companies, and those from whom they procure goods.

A little more detail on what is needed to solve the problem with this approach will be helpful. We must increase the number of prosecutions as well as increase the effectiveness of those prosecutions by: 1) using a victim-centred approach in investigation and prosecution, utilizing enhanced expertise developed through training of law enforcement, prosecutors and judges, providing increased and enhanced sources of evidence beyond victim testimony; 2) increase information sharing between international, state, federal and local authorities; 3) increase law enforcement partnerships with banking and financial services institutions to red-flag data from financial transactions to ferret out traffickers; 4) increase employee training and collaboration of other private sector actors who can help identify and report incidents of trafficking in their communities. We must also decrease the profits that are being made: as long as trafficking remains lucrative, it will continue to thrive.

The business community, the government and financial services sectors should work together to develop common-sense solutions to decrease the profitability of this criminal enterprise which currently nets in the estimates of 150 billion USD annually. Civil society and faith communities have a role to play here, by pressing those entities to do as consumers and constituents. Finally, it is estimated that the total commitment to fighting modern day slavery globally is appallingly low in comparison to the profits. Although the US is the largest financial contributor to initiatives combating trafficking globally, we still spend more in a single month addressing the drug problem than we have spent in the last 15 years in combating trafficking. That is simply insufficient. Resources to effectively combat this scourge must be brought in balance with scale and scope of this problem. We are grateful to the Holy Father for bringing us all together, but it is now time for action. It is time for all

of our cities, all of our governments and all of our people to stand united against this scourge of the earth. I thank you for your attention.