



## Hotels Summit on Human Trafficking: A Proposal

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### Introduction

The first international “Hotels’ Summit on Human Trafficking,” convened in December 2017 by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, United Nations, or both, will gather 30-50 hospitality executives to discuss how they and their companies can fight sexual exploitation and labor rights abuse. Ideally, representatives from smaller, regional brands will flank global names like Marriott, Hilton, InterContinental, Choice, Wyndham, Home Inns, Carlson Rezidor, and Jin Jiang.

The conference will last two days, divided by topic. Presenters on the first will highlight the industry’s connection to trafficking. Having internalized hotels’ vulnerability, attendees will spend the second day hearing about, and considering, possible solutions. Speakers will promote, for example, wider proliferation of human trafficking hotlines and supply chain authentication. Candid debate re: logistical, social, and financial feasibility, and perhaps a signed document similar to the Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders Against Modern Slavery, will conclude the event, with an invitation to convene again in 2019.

### Theory of Change

The hotel industry’s anti-trafficking movement began in 1999, when Carlson joined other donors to fund World Childhood Foundation, a grant-making organization focused on protecting youth. The company’s subsequent work, which involved significant corporate policy reform, sparked interest across the United States, culminating in a 2013 Presidential Award for Extraordinary Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons—the first of its kind. Unfortunately, progress has largely stalled sector-wide since the early 2010s. Employee training programs and amended “Supplier Codes of Conduct” have become goals in themselves, rather than small steps on a longer journey. After all, when consumers demand little, doing a lot means nothing—in fact, it may even hurt you. A simple illustration will suffice.

Imagine Brand X discovers dangerous safety violations in several of its South/South East Asian bed sheet factories. Instead of dropping those suppliers, the company pays for fire extinguishers and subsidizes wage hikes. To cover the cost, however, franchisees must increase room rates. All of a sudden, other hotels have an advantage, even though Brand X did the right thing.

This is why systemic shifts in the hospitality industry depend on lock-step unity: because brands often view sustainability spending with suspicion, they will only change if their competitors change, too. And that cannot happen without dialogue.

The “Hotels’ Summit on Human Trafficking” is no silver-bullet solution, but rather a short-term initiative to build on. In the long-term, companies will have to work side-by-side with unprecedented singularity of mind. Putting them in a small room to candidly discuss the issue—something no one has done before—will get the ball rolling. It is then incumbent on organizers, conveners, NGOs, and the like to direct that energy toward genuine transformation.

### Aims and Objectives

- Procure agreements from every represented company to begin implementing at least one new anti-trafficking policy by the next summit
- Have attendees sign a joint pledge to fight human trafficking
- Leave executives with a better understanding of how human trafficking and hotels intersect, and the confidence that competitors will mirror their policy changes
- Give hotel leaders a new network of contacts with whom they can work in the future
- Catalyze at least one high-profile example of cross-brand collaboration prior to the next summit (e.g., sharing employee training curricula)
- Publish first international report on state of anti-trafficking policies in hotels
- Start critical conversations about hotel industry’s anti-trafficking agenda

## **Barriers and Hurdles**

- Some companies may not want to publicly associate themselves with human trafficking, even if they acknowledge it is a problem
  - o Solution: guarantee that all media (articles, social, photos) will only feature/name consenting brands
- Some companies may refuse to commit to new anti-trafficking measures
  - o Solution: no hard requirement, instead use group pressure à every company will present a progress report at the next summit
- Difficulty getting contact information for executives
  - o Solution: rely on existing personal network, e.g., Nexus and Carlson, and work from there
- Difficulty convincing executives conference is worth their time
  - o Solution: approach more amenable companies first to get initial “sign-ups”; pitch as chance to improve brand image vis-à-vis competitors; push negative PR aspects of not showing up (look bad if rivals attend); lean on power/influence of convener (e.g., Pontifical Academy, U.N.)
- Difficulty building rapport/trust with executives
  - o Solution: cite lifelong family experience in industry, deep respect for hardships and concerns of hotel business

## **Operations and Processes**

Unlike other social good conferences, the “Hotels’ Summit on Human Trafficking” will catalyze genuine change in the private sector. Organizers will schedule biannual conference calls with, and collect annual, one-to-two-page anti-trafficking progress reports from, every represented company. That information, gathered in a central database, will be used to track whether they:

- Train employees to recognize human trafficking
- Ban the use of forced and child labor in “Supplier Codes of Conduct”
- Have signed The Code (ECPAT) and U.N. Global Compact
- Visibly advertise human trafficking hotline information at their hotels
- Work with one or more reputable third-parties to increase supply chain transparency and monitor purchases
- Block on-demand pornographic content
- Donate a percentage of annual giving budget to anti-trafficking organizations
- Actively hire human trafficking survivors

Organizers will not share company-specific information with anyone except those who have attended a summit, and only if the company in question consents. They will limit public-facing content until greater institutionalization allows for the creation of a website. A brief report released every year will summarize what attendees have done and plan to do in the near future.