USE AND MISUSE OF HIGH TECH IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING

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Trafficking in human beings, a contemporary form of slavery, is a universal scourge which is often invisible. There are more slaves today than ever before in history. Slavery affects between 40-60 million people in various forms, from forced slave labour, to sexual slavery, forced organ transplants, to child soldiers, the sale of children and the worst forms of child labour.

Slavery generates USD 150 billions of illicit profits for traffickers every year. 50% of slavery victims are in labour slavery, 37% are in forced marriages, 12% are in sex slavery. Within these statistics, 71% of victims are females, 29% are males, and 25% are children under the age of 18.

The Order of Malta will continue to promote human dignity and to use its international status and diplomatic network to raise awareness of this odious phenomenon
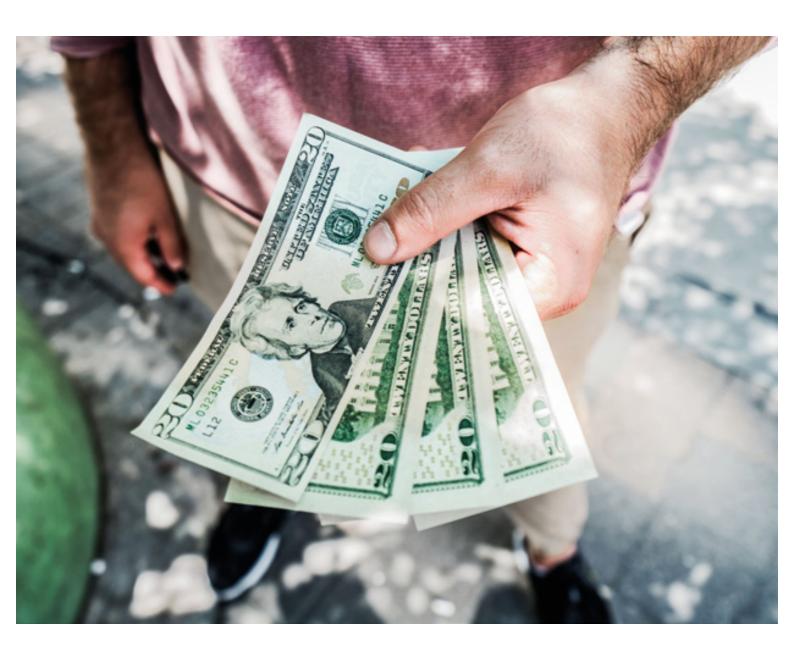
High tech promoting human trafficking

Within the framework of human trafficking, high tech is used in the form of telecommunications, smart phones, computers, artificial intelligence, information technology, mapping technology, satellites and, of course, websites and social networks.

High tech is often misused by human traffickers to identify potential victims on social media and entrap them in exploitation; to recruit victims and 'customers' for online child pornography, sex and labour trafficking; to recruit, advertise women and men for sexual exploitation; to advertise deceptive labour recruitment and migration opportunities; to advertise and control victims of slave labour; to hide traffickers and exploiters (through online anonymity of criminals and financial proceeds); and to facilitate illegal organ transplantation and exploitation. Furthermore, apps can also be used by traffickers to attract children and other victims into forms of human trafficking.

High tech preventing, combating human trafficking, and rehabilitating victims

As ICAT, the Inter-agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons states in a 2019 document Human Trafficking and Technology "The development of technology has had an important influence on the crime of trafficking in persons, presenting both challenges and opportunities. While technology is frequently misused to facilitate trafficking in persons, its positive use can also help practitioners combat the issue, through aiding investigations, enhancing prosecutions, raising awareness, providing services to victims, and shedding new light on the make-up and operation of trafficking networks. Taking this into account, future success in eradicating human trafficking, in its many forms, will depend on how countries and societies are prepared for and equipped to harness technology in their responses."

Thus, high tech tools can help prevent, combat and prosecute human trafficking, and rehabilitate victims: they do this using apps and tech tools to raise awareness, identify and support victims; to aid in investigation by evaluating a plethora of decision alternatives, and provide actionable insights. The tools enhance prosecution through data aggregation and analysis, with satellite imagery and geospatial mapping and through artificial intelligence and facial recognition (to identify victims and traffickers). Blockchain is used to monitor supply chains; technology is used to disrupt human trafficking and increase survivors' access to resources, as does the business coalition, Tech Against Trafficking.

High tech as a support

In conclusion, we must use high tech to promote cooperation, build partnerships, create coalitions and share best practices between all stakeholders.

As the Ambassador of the Sovereign Order of Malta to monitor and combat trafficking in persons it is my role and my duty to work with the Order of Malta's international status and diplomatic network to raise awareness of this odious phenomenon and thus to counteract one of the worst crimes in the world in which we live.

For more information on the Order of Malta's commitment: nohumantrafficking.orderofmalta.int