

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY
FOR THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY
2 December 2009**

On the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, we express our commitment to the complete eradication of slavery and slavery-like practices.

Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “no one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms”. Yet slavery remains a grave and unresolved problem. This is true in Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe.

In our globalized world, new forms of slavery have taken shape. The list of abhorrent practices, new and old, is now shockingly long, and includes debt bondage, serfdom, forced labour, child labour and servitude, trafficking of persons and human organs, sexual slavery, the use of child soldiers, the sale of children, forced marriage and the sale of wives, and the exploitation of prostitution.

The majority of those who suffer are the poor and socially excluded groups such as minorities and migrants. The overlapping factors of poverty, class and race create structural problems and cycles of marginalization that are hard to break.

Indigenous peoples are more exposed to bonded labour because in many countries they have limited access to land. Gender inequalities and discrimination, lack of education, desperation for work and demand for cheap labour also trap people. The global economic and financial crisis threatens to heighten vulnerability further still.

Combating slavery means not only its direct prohibition by law but also fighting against poverty, illiteracy, economic and social disparities, gender discrimination and violence against women and children. We need to enforce laws against slavery; create mechanisms to combat such practices; reinforce bilateral, regional and international cooperation, including with non-governmental organizations that assist victims; and launch awareness raising campaign.

On this International Day, let us renew our pledge to assist and protect the victims and to do our utmost to ensure the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.