

Find a cause!



The Finder talks to, and admires, lots of people who support worthy causes in Singapore. Here JASSMIN PETER finds out more about human trafficking, what some organisations are doing in the fight to stop it and how you can help.

In 2010, the spotlight was thrown on Anuradha Koirala (pictured above left) when she won the *CNN Hero of the Year* award for her unwavering efforts to help victims of sex trafficking in Nepal. A teacher turned social activist, 62-year-old Anuradha started her quest in 1993. She was involved in raiding brothels, patrolling the India-Nepal border and rescuing girls on the verge of being sold into the sex trade and a life of rape, torture and slavery for profit – someone else's. Through her own foundation *Maiti Nepal*, Anuradha has helped almost 12,000 such women and youngsters get an education, find work or learn a skill – finding a permanent way out from their dark sex slavery days and towards a brighter life.

For certain there is general abhorrence towards human trafficking, however, the activity continues to thrive and in some cases, is growing at appalling rates. This is a by-product of three main factors – there's a strong demand for cheap or easily exploited labour, a vast supply of people seeking an income to meet their most basic needs and others who seek opportunities to improve their lives or living standards. Human trafficking is the third largest international crime – after illegal drugs and arms trafficking – and is believed to rake in billions of dollars each year. According to the *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes*, human trafficking is one of the fastest growing criminal activities in the world and exists in every continent, region and country – from the poorest to the richest. And in most modern societies, especially in Singapore, where in the face of economic progress, the Republic has become a potential hub for such operations.

The uncomfortable truth is that sex trafficking is right at your doorstep. But you can do something about it. Even the smallest gesture can help.



United we stand: Bridget (second from left), Pia (third from left) and Josephine (second from right) together with campaign partners.

Taking action

The quest to eradicate this global crisis is on-going requiring participation from government and non-government organisations.



In 2010, The Singapore Government formed the *Inter-Agency Taskforce on Trafficking in Persons (TIP)*, which is currently working on a National Plan of Action. While Ng Yeow Boon, Co-Chair of TIP admits that "more can always be done," the taskforce is already committed to increasing its vigilance and responsiveness by aggressively and proactively targeting commercial sex syndicates here. The Taskforce is also taking specific measures to identify trafficking victims through intelligence-gathering and keeping prostitution in check.

"The Ministry of Community Development, Youth & Sports (MCYS) and the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), funds shelters and dormitories offering protection for trafficking victims, including accommodation, medical care, and counselling and translation services," asserts Ng Yeow Boon. Currently, depending on the nature of the specific human trafficking related offences, anyone who commits such an offence is punished with a maximum prison term of 10 years although the Taskforce is currently reviewing existing laws, legislations, policies and enforcement practices to better combat the crime.



HOME (Humanitarian Organization for Migration) is a registered charity providing services to migrant communities in Singapore including victims of labour and sexual exploitation. The shelter provides helplines, help desk, medical and transportation assistance, paralegal assistance, case support and follow up with the police, ICA, MOM and embassies. According to Founder-President Bridget Tan, "HOME has also embarked on a nation-wide campaign to reach out to the migrant community and potentially vulnerable groups with information dissemination, discussions and training on TIP indicators and discussions with volunteers' best practices to combat human trafficking."



A very prominent and on-going movement is *The Body Shop's STOP Sex Trafficking of Children and Young People* campaign. This three-year partnership with *ECAP International* also sees a great deal of involvement from *UN Women*. Launched in 65 countries the campaign calls for governments to step up efforts to stop human trafficking and aims to create long-lasting social awareness and tackle trafficking with a three-pronged approach – fundraising, petitioning and awareness generation. Josephine Chow, General Manager of *The Body Shop* explains, "...all the public needs to do is as simple as purchasing a specially-developed Soft Hands Kind Heart Hand Cream or purchasing the STOP Bag for Life. All profits from the sale go to ECAP and *The Body Shop* has raised close to \$270,000."

The petition movement has so far seen seven million people sign in support for the *United Nations International Conventions* to call all governments to build awareness to better understand the issue of trafficking and take concrete action. "...once people understand the issue better, they can collectively call for change and would be more empowered to do so... with the issue being real and present, we expect change will be enacted and that the public can do so via the platforms *The Body Shop* have provided," says Josephine.



According to Pia Bruce (pictured above right), "The Singapore National Committee for UN Women's role in the STOP Sex Trafficking of Children and Young People campaign has primarily been that of public awareness built through talks, film screenings, concerts, book discussion session and engagement with the Government to work towards improved prevention measures against trafficking, prosecution of offenders and increased support services for victims."

So ultimately, it's not enough to just talk about the issue, it's time to do something about it. As individuals, we don't need to wait for huge funds or the backup of a major organisation to fight the war against human trafficking. Start today by doing something small as being the eyes and ears and reporting any suspicious cases of trafficking. All we need is compassion and willingness to make this world a better place – a lesson best learnt through Anuradha Koirala's unwavering efforts to help victims of sex trafficking. **E**

Support a cause!

Volunteer at HOME – www.home.org.sg

Purchase a STOP Bag or Soft Hands Kind Heart Hand Cream from

The Body Shop – www.thebodyshop.com

Volunteer with UN Women – www.unwomen-nc.org.sg

Read the full Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Young People in Singapore report – www.thebodyshop.com.sg/global/img/editorial/Singapore_Research_Report.pdf