



ELCIC

*In Mission
for Others*

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

600-177 Lombard Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 0W5 Canada. www.elcic.ca
Toll free: 1.888.786.6707, Phone: 204.984.9150, Fax: 204.984.9185

March 27, 2015

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister:

I am writing on behalf of the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) to urge the Government of Canada to address the issue of sexual exploitation.

Voices from around the world are calling attention to the tragedy, injustice and devastation of human trafficking. These voices include women's groups across Canada, Indigenous leaders, the Canadian Council of Churches and the United Nations.

Our partner the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has summarized the challenge of human trafficking in this way:

The most basic notion of human dignity in all religious traditions maintains that human beings are not movable possessions (chattels) to be bought and sold. And yet an increasing number of human beings are trafficked each year across international borders, and probably even more within national boundaries. It is reported that some 80% of the people trafficked are women and girls, of whom about 50% are minors. The reasons are related to sexual exploitation, organized begging, forced or underpaid labour, and "organ harvesting"—all of which undermine the dignity of the persons trafficked. According to research undertaken by UNICEF, and UNESCO and other UN agencies every continent is affected in some way by the scourge of human trafficking. Thus no church or religious community can excuse itself from addressing this pressing issue.

The reasons for human trafficking are extremely complex because they interconnect with other factors. Therefore there are no stand-alone solutions to this problem. It can be summarized as falling into two categories, namely the "push" factors and the "pull" factors.

Push factors

Poverty: The single most important push factor in the developing countries is poverty. When

individuals are living in an extremely desperate economic situation and need to feed themselves and their families, they fall victim to criminal syndicates.

Insecurity: Insecurity is also a major push factor. Insecurity may result from armed conflicts, political crises, domestic or community violence, natural disasters, or from the breakdown of social structures and symbols of authority that protect human dignity in traditional society. People fleeing from violence and other causes of insecurity lose the protection of family and community and find themselves at greatly increased risk of human trafficking.

Pull factors

Demand: A key external pull factor is obviously the demand in the wealthier countries in the Middle East and the West for cheap labour both in the general labour market and in the commercial sex industry.

Profit: For some, trafficking in human beings is a highly lucrative business. According to some estimates, profits are as high as 20 billion US dollars annually. Organized crime cartels involved in human trafficking operate through an amorphous network that involves a variety of intermediaries.

False promises/unrealistic expectations: Many of those trafficked are lured by false promises or by unrealistic expectations of life and economic opportunities in the destination countries. Without reliable information about the real experiences of those who have been trafficked, poor people in rural communities have very few defences to protect them from following—or sending their children to follow—a mirage.

We absolutely reject the turning of human beings into commodities, especially for the purposes of forced or exploitive labour, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, armed conflict, or “organ harvesting.”¹

A variety of responses will be required to effectively address the push and pull factors that contribute to human trafficking.

On behalf of the ELCIC, I urge the government of Canada to provide resources for the protection of victims of sexual exploitation, including counselling, accessible, affordable and safe housing, eligibility and access to health and social services, employment referrals, and offer language training.

In addition, I urge the Government of Canada to provide law enforcement resources for the prosecution and rehabilitation of offenders who engage in human trafficking.

I also wish to express my support for a national inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.

¹ Agenda exhibit 8 Meeting of the LWF Council, Report of General Secretary Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko, Arusha, Tanzania, 25–30 June 2008 Page 3–4

As a church *In Mission for Others*, the members of the ELCIC have committed to responding faithfully to opportunities for partnerships and cooperation between church and society, to working for legislation that will protect persons liberated from being trafficked and to playing roles in bringing about cultural transformation and the elimination of trafficking.

My prayers are with you and the Government of Canada as you offer leadership to addressing issues of sexual exploitation and to eliminating human trafficking.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by the name Susan C. Johnson in a cursive script.

The Rev. Susan C. Johnson
National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

cc. The Honourable Thomas J. Mulcair, Leader of the Official Opposition
Justin Trudeau, Leader of the Liberal Party
Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party
Louis Plamondon, Bloc Québécois Caucus