

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Coalition for Ontario Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force**

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### **SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH OF THE COALITION FOR A FORMAL ONTARIO ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE**

On October 15, 2011, Canadians attending the Alliance Against Modern Slavery's 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference called upon our federal, provincial and municipal governments to step up the fight against human trafficking in Ontario. Speakers included The Hon. Jean Augustine, MPs Judy Sgro (Liberal Party), Malcolm Allen (New Democratic Party) and Terence Young (Conservative Party), law enforcement personnel, NGOs, survivors, activists and researchers. Those in attendance signed a petition and expressed their support for a Coalition for an Ontario Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force. On October 16, 2011, the coalition's steering committee convened for a first non-partisan, non-denominational, multi-disciplinary meeting.

Slavery, one of the most egregious crimes against humanity is now legally abolished globally. However, the practice persists and affects the lives of 27 million people worldwide, including thousands of Canadians. "Canada is a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking for the purposes of forced labour, sex and marriage. The RCMP estimates that only 5% of Canadians understand the continued practice of slavery. Fewer realize that the everyday commodities we consume, such as coffee, chocolate and clothing are produced by slave labour" said conference organizer Karlee Sapoznik of the Harriet Tubman Institute. Sapoznik also stressed the need to continue to foster a spirit of alliance among all groups, inspiring a movement to fight for the safety and wellbeing of victims.

Coalition coordinator Ann Baka stressed that "Humanity has progressed in so many ways, but has barely moved in others. In most people, the concept of slavery provokes a gut feeling of revulsion, and abhorrence, but it is neither a concept nor just a piece of collective history. It is happening today, worldwide and in Canada, and in Ontario, and yes, in our backyard. It is time to put good intentions into action and end the sale of human beings. All life has great value. We need to take a deep breath and remember."

The Coalition for a Formal Ontario Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force has received strong support from experts, non-governmental organizations and survivors:

"Human Trafficking is a tragedy in our society. I look forward to working with the Alliance Against Modern Slavery and the Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force to develop mechanisms for victim identification and response." – **Marty Van Doren, RCMP Human Trafficking Awareness Coordinator**

"The need for an Ontario Task Force (and ultimately one in all provinces) and therefore bringing the citizens together with the federal, provincial and municipal governments in

the fight, is really the only way this crime will ever be defeated. What could be more important than educating the public on gaps mentioned by AAMS, and helping the victims of human trafficking?" – **Glendene Grant, mother of missing human trafficking victim Jessie Foster**

"The participants reached consensus that a task force is needed, and commenced the practical planning. By doing so, we have made two great strides toward consolidating Ontario's response to human trafficking. The mission of PACT-Ottawa is to network with other groups to prevent trafficking and enhance the protection of victims. Therefore we are proud to be a part of this initiative. What Ontarians have begun in their home communities, this coalition will help to leverage for the benefit of trafficked persons." – **Christina Harrison-Baird, Persons against the Crime of Trafficking in Humans.**

"We are proud to be part of this initiative and look forward to working with other groups to put an end to human trafficking in our province and around the world. – **Stan Burditt, founder of Men Against Sexual Trafficking**

"The importance of an Ontario Anti-Trafficking Task Force is paramount to aid in the fight against human slavery today in Canada. As part of the coalition to form the first Anti-Trafficking Task Force in Ontario, we call on all parties of the Provincial Government to stand united with us. If organized crime and lower level street gangs can communicate and work together, we also need to be able to come together regardless of our political views or ideologies to say that 'the Province of Ontario' will not tolerate men, women and children in our province to be bought or sold for the purpose of exploitation." – **Shae Invidiata, Founder of Free-Them.**

We urge the people of Ontario to support this multidisciplinary task force of experts dedicated to research, education, advocacy and aid in partnership. This will result in better co-ordinated social services, health care, shelter, legal aid, reintegration and vocational training for victims as well as public education and training on human trafficking victim identification to a broader range of federal, provincial, territorial and municipal officials and community service providers.

The steering committee of the Coalition for a Formal Ontario Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force includes representatives from: Alliance Against Modern Slavery; Free-Them; London Anti-Human Trafficking Committee; Men Against Sex Trafficking; Manitoba Child Protection Branch, Family Services & Consumer Affairs; Migrant Worker Justice; Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking in Humans; Project 417; RCMP; Salvation Army 614 Network; Sex Trade 101; Women's Support Network of York Region; and York University's Harriet Tubman Institute.

For more information, or to schedule an interview:

**Visit:** [www.allianceagainstmodernslavery.org](http://www.allianceagainstmodernslavery.org)

**See:** Press release and backgrounder of October 7, 2011 at

<http://www.allianceagainstmodernslavery.org/documents/Ontario%20Task%20Force%20-%20Press%20Release%20-%20October%207th.pdf>

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