

PRESS RELEASE

[free-them]

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Immigration Minister Jason Kenney Gives Statement at 3rd Annual [free-them] Walk for Freedom Presented by The Fairmont Royal York

Walk for Freedom Stops Traffic, Raises Heads and Uncovers Human Trafficking in Canada

Toronto, ON Sept. 18, 2012 – This past Saturday anti-human trafficking organization, [free-them] and over 700 supporters took to the streets of Toronto as part of a five-kilometer walk to raise awareness of human trafficking for purposes of forced labour and sexual exploitation. The 3rd Annual [free-them] Walk for Freedom presented by The Fairmont Royal York raised over \$40,000 for Canada-wide victim rescue and support services.

The event included a honorary ceremony, in which Canada's top speakers on the topic of human trafficking spoke. Among them was, Member of Parliament Joy Smith, Canada's leading politician fighting human trafficking and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney. Minister Kenney said human trafficking is a problem globally, including in Canada. The minister went on to say women in Canada are trapped in the sex trade by organized crime.

On July 14, 2012, in an effort to decrease human trafficking to Canada, Minister Kenney along with Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Diane Finley announced that immigration officers will no longer process any work permit applications from foreign nationals seeking employment in a strip club, escort service or massage parlour, essentially denying businesses related to the sex trade access to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program.

Human trafficking survivor, Timea Nagy shared her story. Ms. Nagy was trafficked 14 years ago from Hungary to Canada. She was promised a decent job, but when she arrived in Canada she was confined to a motel room, prostituted and forced to work in a strip club. After she escaped her traffickers Ms. Nagy went to the Canadian police. Now a survivor of human trafficking, Ms. Nagy is the founder of Walk With Me, which rescues victims of human trafficking in Canada and provides them with support to get back into a life within the community.

Among the honoured attendees was also RCMP Constable Lepa Jankovic, who received the *iStand Award*, during the ceremony, for bringing down the largest human trafficking ring in Canadian history: Project O'Papa. The ground breaking case revealed the Hamilton-based trafficking ring and led to the arrests of three traffickers and the rescue of 23 victims.

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“The majority of the victims were men from Hungary who had come to Canada expecting a better life with plans to send money home to their families. The reality was that they were forced to work without pay and held against their will,” said RCMP Constable Lepa Jankovic. “That is what is truly heartbreaking about the case.”

After the honorary ceremony, the five-kilometer walk reaching Queen’s Park and ending at Osgoode Hall took place.

“It is alarming that many Canadians are not aware that human trafficking – modern day slavery is happening in Canada. It is not only a problem found in the third world,” said [free-them] founder, Shae Invidiata. “The two most prevalent forms of human trafficking in our country are forced labour and sexual exploitation. The average age of entry into forced prostitution in Canada is 13 years old; at 13 years old that is never a choice. We are calling on Canadians to join the voice for freedom to say that human beings should not be bought or sold.



About Shae Invidiata and [free-them]

Invidiata moved to the United States at 18 to pursue a degree in Advertising at Hawaii Pacific University, which is where her journey began in her fight against human trafficking. Seven years later, with an associates in Marketing from HPU and a BA in Religious Studies from The University of British Columbia, Invidiata works fulltime as a Sales Representative at The Invidiata Team - #1 REMAX Team in Canada, and #2 RE/MAX Team Worldwide 2010.

In January 2010, Invidiata officially founded [free-them], an initiative dedicated to raising awareness and funds to abolish human trafficking in Canada and abroad by partnering with people, organizations, businesses, law enforcement and government to fight human trafficking - slavery today. Invidiata regularly speaks at different high schools, professional groups, public events and speaks with the media to educate, bring awareness, and action to fight human trafficking. [free-them] has lead and organized different events all over Toronto and the GTA, such as paneled discussions at The University of Toronto, premiering and bringing the film Call+Response to Toronto, hosting the 2nd Annual Freedom Walk in Toronto, to seeing Criminal Codes amended.

Invidiata with [free-them] was a Stakeholder in MP Joy Smith's Private Members Bills C-268, and C-310 of which both received Royal Assent and amended the Criminal Code in Canada, June 2010, and June 2012. On June 6, 2012, the Government of Canada launched the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking which stemmed from MP Joy Smith’s proposal for a National Action Plan that she released in 2010 entitled *Connecting the Dots*, Invidiata with [free-them] was a Stakeholder for this proposal as well. Invidiata has sat on round table discussions for MPP Kevin Flynn in the efforts to create new policies that were brought before the Legislator in June 2011.

Invidiata with [free-them] is one of the founding Coalition members to forming the first Ontario Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force. On October 3, 2011 MP Terence Young gave his Members Statement-SO31- in the House of Commons to recognize the work of Invidiata and her efforts with [free-them] to combat human trafficking.

Invidiata and [free-them] have appeared on and been interviewed by many different media sources, including but not limited to, The Toronto Star, Much Music, CTV, CP24 News, The Morning Live Show CHCH News, The Daily Show Rogers TV, 106 The "X", Actor Eric Balfour "Balfour Yard Blog", Notable.ca, The Drew Marshall Show Joy 1280, Metro News, Inside Halton, SNAP Toronto, and SNAP Oakville.

Invidiata was a nominee for Canadian Women's Fashion Magazine Chatelaine as a Top 20 Finalist for "Canada's Women of the Year 2011" for her work and dedication to fight human trafficking and raise up others to join in the worthy fight. Invidiata was recognized with the YMCA Peace Medallion 2011. Most recent Invidiata was a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, being recognized for her dedication and service to citizens of Canada.

For more information about [free-them] and their ongoing efforts please visit freethem.ca
For more information about MP Joy Smith and her work please visit joysmith.ca