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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **HALTON & PEEL BUSINESSES SUPPORT ANTI-SLAVERY ORGANIZATION AT [FREE-THEM] FREEDOM WALK**

**Halton, ON (Friday, August 23, 2013)** – While back to school preparations govern heavy on the minds of many in Halton, for a motivated group of local volunteers, September is a month to raise awareness about the thousands of victims of human trafficking in Canada.

On September 14, hundreds of residents of the Halton/Peel region (and surrounding communities) will participate in the 4<sup>th</sup> annual [free-them] Freedom Walk, a four-kilometre walk hosted by one of Canada's leading anti-slavery advocacy groups [free-them]. Founded in Oakville, [free-them] has grown its annual walk from an initiative of 15 people to over 500 walkers including children, seniors and even babies alongside their parents.

"It's important for us to have the local community involved in the fight against human trafficking", comments Shae Invidiata, founder, [free-them]. "[free-them] was founded in the Halton region and southwestern Ontario is a hub of trafficking in Canada. As the average age of entry into human trafficking in Canada is just thirteen years old, many of our local children are being forced into a life of exploitation- children aged nine, ten and eleven years old. Victims are being trafficked from Hamilton and Milton and brought to Mississauga and Toronto. For this reason in particular, it is important for our local companies to be engaged in raising awareness against this horrific crime."

Taking place in downtown Toronto, presenting sponsor The Fairmont Royal York will play a key role in the walk by providing a home base for the walks' participants, (often called Freedom Fighters). Participants will start the motivating morning on the convention floor of the Fairmont Royal York with an honorary ceremony, performances and keynote addresses from some of Canada's leading voices and change makers in the fight against human trafficking. The walk will end on the steps of City Hall.

"It's important for our local community to come together and support [free-them]'s initiatives" says Claudia Di Poala, Broker, REMAX Aboutowne. "Human trafficking is a local problem that is happening here in our own backyard. We are proud to sponsor the 4<sup>th</sup> annual Freedom Walk and [free-them]'s initiative to stop human trafficking in Canada".

Other Halton sponsors include The Invidiata Team RE/MAX, Remington Homes, The Royal Bank of Canada, Bruce Etherington & Associates, Iovate Health Sciences, RE/MAX Aboutowne, and My Best Choice.

"I'm extremely grateful and proud that seven of our major sponsors for this year's walk are based out of Oakville and Mississauga," adds Invidiata. "With their support for the [free-them] Freedom Walk, these companies are truly helping us fight human trafficking in Canada".

Support from the Halton region comes more from just sponsorship. Students from Halton based schools such as Kings Christian Collegiate, Pilgrims Way and Oakville Trafalgar High School will create teams and participate. Local storeowners recruit patrons to participate in the walk through signage in their window fronts and flyers by their cash registers. Law enforcement from the Halton, Peel and Niagara regions will join the 500 walkers as will notable government officials including Oakville's MP Terence Young.

The team at [free-them] is knee deep in preparation to make the 2013 walk even larger than years prior. Among those scheduled to participate are: MP Joy Smith: Canada's leading politician in the area of human trafficking, Constable Lepa Jankovic: one of the two RCMP officers who brought down Canada's largest human trafficking ring to go before Canadian courts and Timea E. Nagy: an author, speaker, and survivor of human trafficking right here in Canada. Returning in a larger capacity for the 2013 [free-them] Freedom Walk is OMNI Television's, Veronica Chail who will officially host this year's walk and provide support through the walk's media sponsors OMNI Television and City TV.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Freedom Walk presented by the Fairmont Royal York and hosted by OMNI Television's Veronica Chail takes place on Saturday, September 14, 2013 at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel located at 100 Front Street West. Registration is \$12 per person (children under 18 are free) and families are welcome. Onsite activities include a fair-trade, slave-free vendor area to support initiatives that donate proceeds to victims, a kids zone with activities for youth, a media lounge for private interviews and a continental breakfast.

Last year's walk raised \$30,000 dollars for victims of human trafficking in Canada and was featured on local Halton and major news programs across the country.

For more information or to register to walk, please log on to [www.freethemwalk.ca](http://www.freethemwalk.ca).

*[free-them] is a volunteer-based initiative dedicated to raising awareness and funds to abolish human trafficking in Canada and abroad. Founded in January 2010, [free-them] is committed to partnering with businesses, government and law enforcement to fight human trafficking (slavery today) through awareness, education, legislation and fundraising for front line organizations. For more information about [free-them], please log on to [www.freethem.ca](http://www.freethem.ca) or follow them on twitter @free\_them.*

- 30 -

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