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## Modern-day slavery increasing

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Human trafficking is officially abolished in all global communities, yet despite diligent efforts the numbers of reported victims of modern-day slavery are steadily increasing. There are an estimated 700,000-800,000 persons trafficked annually across international borders with 30 million victims worldwide at any given time.

The majority of trafficking victims are generally between the ages of 18 and 24, with more than one million children trafficked annually. Efforts such as those stemming from this powerful coalition bring hope, as increasingly more countries are developing domestic laws to combat the trafficking in humans. To date, just over 116 countries have enacted legislations to stop all forms of modern-day slavery.

As institutions of higher learning, advocates, governments, government officials, corporations, we need to invest in the business of the struggle against modern-day slavery. Some of us readily invest in new technology, risky stock portfolios and innovative business concepts; let us now invest in ourselves, and our neighbors — in promoting the dignity of the human person.

The academy's role is crucial. Within the United States, and on international levels, institutions of higher learning serve as incubators, think tanks, research institutions, and clinics for faculty, students, and neighboring communities. Academic institutions serve as the initial learning and informational portals on topical issues and partnerships can exist in a number of venues and cross-disciplines within academia. Accordingly, since modern-day slavery is one of the human rights concerns of our day, higher education institutions have and must continue to develop curricula and modules focused on educating their students on the roots, causes, and solutions.

St. Thomas University has been a pioneer in the struggle. More than 250 law students and others work directly with issues of migration, servitude and abuse. Our Human Rights Institute, founded in 1992, processes more than 6,000 Haitian and Cuban migrants every year. Most of our 11 law school clinics have a focus on the underserved. The law school has adopted a holistic approach to human-rights issues as these violations intersect many legal and social constructs, is committed to environmental study and recently instituted an LL.M. in Environmental Sustainability.

It was for this reason that we created our Center for Global Justice and Dialogue, to become an important resource serving our law students, the South Florida community, the nation and the world.

The Center will house three central programs that advance our commitment to social justice: The Institute for Law and Public Service; The Institute for Intercultural and Sustainability Research; and our world-renowned Graduate Programs in Intercultural Human Rights and Environmental Sustainability will call the Center home.

Through its research mission, it will provide a forum for rigorous problem- and policy-oriented analysis of issues of global and national significance. Like an academic think tank, it will identify, study and develop solutions to pressing issues facing the planet. I personally commit the participants in the Center for Global Justice and Dialogue to continue to work on the issue of human trafficking.

Using our trove of data, the scholarship of talented faculty and students and the gathering of world leaders at the Center, we will continue to be a force in this area and others plaguing the global community. It is still a long road, but we are on the right track.

This article is adapted from the closing address offered by Msgr. Franklyn M. Casale, president of St. Thomas University, at the U.S. Embassy to the Holy See recently at an international forum on human trafficking hosted by the university.

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