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Misdirected: The Real Enemy Behind the United States' War Against Human Trafficking

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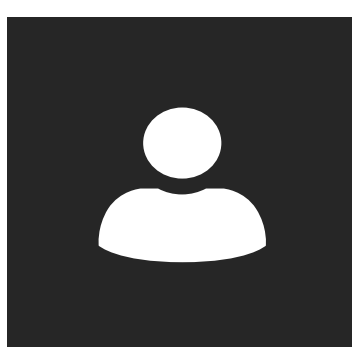
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Misled: The Real Enemy Behind the U.S.'s War Against Trafficking



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WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

The crime of human trafficking, as defined by the UN's Palermo Protocols, is threefold: it must involve the movement or harboring of people, the use of coercion or force to do this, and the intention to exploit.

LEGISLATION EXAMINED

1. The U.N.'s Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
2. U.S.'s Abolish Human Trafficking Act of 2017
3. U.S.'s Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2018

Biases in Anti-Human Trafficking Legislation & Campaigning

A bias written into the UN's Palermo Protocol has grown to plague policymaking and media coverage within the U.S. for decades: it has narrowed the public narrative about human trafficking and focused it specifically on sex trafficking to the point where the two have become nearly synonymous in both legislative and public understanding. This erases the urgency of the issue of labor trafficking and targets sex workers.

Impact on Sex Workers

<i>Patterns in Legislation</i>	<i>Effect on sex workers</i>
Disproportionate focus on sex trafficking, minimal acknowledgment of labor trafficking	Erases the agency of sex workers by conflating <i>consensual</i> sex work with <i>nonconsensual</i> sex trafficking
Partnering with or funding anti-trafficking organizations that are expressly anti-sex work	Promotes these organizations and supports the invalidation and criminalization of sex workers
Limited material support for victims of trafficking	No support for apprehended sex workers; often, they are prosecuted
Focus on law enforcement and punitive measures, funneling money into policing	Increases policing of sex workers, exposing them to assault and other risks from the police as well as prosecution

Impact on Migrants

In the U.S., Labor migrants are the most vulnerable population to trafficking. However, instances of forced labor are severely underreported in this field because of inaccessibility and distrust of police and legal bodies, resulting in very low visibility of a significant population of people. Often, anti-trafficking legislation not only disregards but actively harms those vulnerable to trafficking when investing in policing solutions.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Critics of the current anti-trafficking movement have proposed solutions that focus on humanizing, healing structures that protect those who are at risk and support victims of trafficking in all their complexity. These include:

- Installing better workplace regulations to reduce the exploitative commercial environments where trafficking abounds
- Moving away from criminalizing undocumented immigrants
- Working to improve workers' rights
- Increasing accessibility of trafficking information and knowledge of workers' rights

CITATIONS

Abolish Human Trafficking Act of 2017. 2018. U.S. Department of State. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-115s1311enr/pdf/BILLS-115s1311enr.pdf>.

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