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INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

Statement by:
The Honourable Bev Busson

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[English]

Hon. Bev Busson: Honourable senators, I rise today to mark the United Nations International Day for the Abolition of Slavery. When one hears the word “slavery,” most Canadians think of historic slavery; the repugnant trafficking of humans, and more specifically, the sale of over 12 million Africans from the 16th to 19th centuries. They were torn from their families and homes and sold throughout Europe and the New World as commodities. The aftershocks of that crime against humanity still reverberate today, and we must recognize the resultant human pain and suffering.

Unfortunately, this blight on humanity continues in parts of the world today, but the concept of modern slavery sadly entails the same deprivation of basic human rights, loss of freedom and control of one’s own life, even today and even in Canada. This day focuses on eradicating human trafficking, sexual exploitation, unacceptable child labour, and forced marriage for all vulnerable people being exploited under the threat of violence or coercion.

Our colleague, Senator Julie Miville-Dechêne, has confronted head-on important aspects of modern slavery in Bill S-216.

[Translation]

She spoke so eloquently about this topic in this chamber, and I applaud her initiative.

Human trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children who make up over 90% of the victims is the major focus of this form of barbarism. The United Nations estimates that there are 4.8 million people in forced sexual exploitation. This is an astonishing number, and many victims are Canadian. Organized crime figures, including the Hells Angels, control this lucrative market. I personally have come face to face with this ugly reality which exists in the shadows of our nation, victimizing many, including vulnerable young girls.

This is a human tragedy that feeds on poverty, sexism, racism, wage inequality, lack of education and fear. Police forces across the country, in partnership with the RCMP Human Trafficking National Coordination Center, work to protect the victims as well as search out and prosecute the exploiters both nationally and internationally. It is disturbing and difficult to see the damage caused, and this crime is also incredibly difficult to prosecute due to the raw vulnerability of those affected.

I ask that we in the Senate use every opportunity to support Canada’s National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking in all possible ways. I commend the men and women of our police services who work tirelessly on these crimes. It is gruelling and emotionally scarring work.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*
