

Human Trafficking at the Crossroads

Private-Public Partnership to Fight Human Trafficking

2-3 March 2009
Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain



Speech

by

David Arkless

Manpower President - Corporate and Government Affairs
Special Envoy of the campaign "End Human Trafficking Now"

"Business Leader's Perspective"

Your Royal Highness Shaikha Sabeeka, Your Excellency Suzanne Mubarak,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to be with you today reaching another milestone on the path we started in Athens over two years ago. In Athens, for the first time we as business leaders joined forces with other partners to say **NO!** to human trafficking. Moreover, we agreed on the Ethical Principles not only to make sure that our companies were not implicated in this crime, but also to do as much as we could to contribute towards its global eradication. My company – Manpower – was among the first to endorse and apply the Ethical Principles.

Today, more than ever the vision of the Ethical Principles is relevant. The ongoing financial crisis reminds us that a business without ethical rules can be a very dangerous enterprise. It is not only business that bears the drastic consequences of unethical behavior. It is society as a whole that pays the ultimate price, as pointed out by H.E. Mrs. Mubarak. Fortunately, more and more businesses are aware that with financial power comes responsibility towards both shareholders and towards the community and society in which we operate.

However, we are not yet there – there is still much to be done. I am confident this conference will contribute towards this end and I am pleased to see many business leaders here demonstrating the commitment of the business community to do its part in eliminating this crime.

Since 2006 when I was invited to be the Special Envoy of the campaign End Human Trafficking Now, I have been trying to encourage my fellow business colleagues to endorse its Ethical Principles and join us in the battle against human trafficking. And I must warn you – I have not always received a warm welcome.

At the end of 2006, I sent a personal letter to the CEOs/Chairmen of the 1000 largest world corporations inviting them to endorse the Ethical Principles. I was hoping that a resolute **NO!** to human trafficking would resonate from the top business leaders to make it clear that legitimate business will not tolerate this illicit practice – a practice that annually generates over 32 billion US dollars and which has become the third largest criminal activity worldwide.

The response (if any) was very disturbing. Paradoxically, some of the businesses were afraid to take a resolute stance against human trafficking because, by doing so, they feared to be associated with this crime. Others – a silent majority – most probably thought it has nothing to do with them. Both cannot be more wrong.

History teaches us that it is ignorance and failure to act that brings about a triumph of evil.

However, there have been many positive achievements on our journey.

By attending major events and conferences and constantly working with the press and appearing on TV over the last two years, I have tried to make sure that the appeal for a stronger engagement of the business community against human trafficking has been heard.

As a Special Envoy of the campaign, we have succeeded in bringing on board more than 12 000 corporations and organizations, endorsing the Ethical Principles directly, or through the commitment of their industry federations. This effort continues to receive strong support from the business community worldwide.

In our own industry of employment services we continue to inspire other companies to play a key role in fighting human trafficking – mostly by providing legitimate work opportunities, applying standards and regulations and launching employment programs in different countries in partnership with governments. Through specific projects, Manpower provides training for job opportunities to victims of human trafficking, so they can fully recover and be effectively reintegrated into society. We are working hard to assist people to find safe work both at home and abroad. This includes raising awareness to help them to recognize illegal recruiters, to understand risks involved and to offer alternative solutions. Very often having the alternative of decent employment can be crucial in the prevention of human trafficking.

In our campaign End Human Trafficking Now, we also believe that a multiplier effect will increase the effectiveness of anti-trafficking efforts. In today's global economy, the combined efforts of business leaders can serve to combat this scourge internationally. Businesses can leverage their resources and existing alliances, and build on efforts that raise awareness among employees, partners and clients in companies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sometimes, there is a thin line between legal and illegal, between ethical and unethical. Laws may be ambiguous or missing. However, corporations enjoy enormous power today and they have the means available to make sure that they are not implicated directly or indirectly in illicit practices such as human trafficking. I invite business leaders, who have not done so, to endorse Athens Ethical Principles and to join us in the anti-trafficking struggle as of today.

By this time tomorrow, 36 000 more people around the world will have been trafficked. This is our world and these are our people – we all have a responsibility in this fight.

Thank you for listening and I urge you to continue our fight against trafficking.