

I.L.O. Sees Rise In Forced Labor And Slavery

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Body

Forced labor, **slavery** and criminal trafficking in people are increasing globally, with women and children most at risk, the International Labor Organization says.

Increased efforts are needed to "stamp out the scourge of forced labor once and for all," the labor agency said in a report that examined the issue, which is set for debate by its 175 member nations at an annual meeting next month.

Although the report, "Stopping Forced Labor," did not quantify the problem, it said compelled work -- **slavery**, debt bondage or bonded labor -- was found worldwide. "The emerging picture is one where **slavery**, oppression and exploitation of society's most vulnerable members, especially women and children, have by no means been consigned to the past," said Juan Somavia, the agency's director general.

By far the fastest growing form of forced labor is trafficking in people, which is so pervasive that most nations are either sending, transit or receiving countries, the report said. The workers are sent to richer countries, with the United States believed to be the destination for 50,000 such women and children every year. Most are destined for the sex trade or domestic work. Many from the former Soviet Union end up in Western European sweatshops.

Yet traffickers, who are usually part of a criminal network, are rarely caught, and penalties are lighter than for drug smuggling.

Traditional forms of forced labor, like **slavery** and bonded labor, also ensnare vast numbers of people. In South and Central America, the Caribbean and South Asia, millions of people "are tied to their work through a vicious circle of debt," the report said.

Burma has been cited by the labor agency for compelling villagers to toil on public works. The country has outlawed the practice, but human rights groups and trade unions said this year that they had evidence that it was continuing.

The report also pointed to the use of prisoners by private companies. It said about 30 American states had legalized the practice of contracting out prison labor since 1990.

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