

fact sheet

today's fight for tomorrow's freedom

Slavery past and present

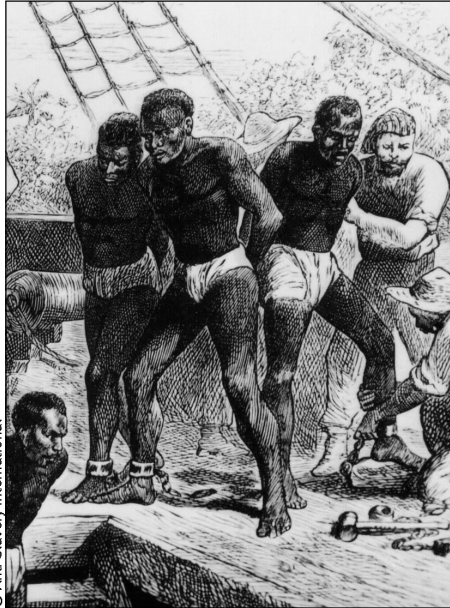
Right: Slaves being forced below deck. Despite the fact that many slaves were chained for the voyage it is estimated that a rebellion occurred on one out of every eight slave ships that crossed the Atlantic.

For many people, this is the image that comes to mind when they hear the word slavery. We think of the buying and selling of people, their shipment from one continent to another and the abolition of the trade in the early 1800s. Even if we know little about the slave trade, we think of it as part of our history rather than our present.

In fact, the slave trade continues to have an impact today. Its legacies include racism, discrimination and the development and under-development of communities and countries affected by the trade. And slavery itself is not a thing of the past. Millions of women, children and men around the world are trapped in slavery, today.

Hasn't slavery been abolished?

Officially, yes. Today, under international law slavery is illegal. In practice, women from Eastern Europe are bonded into prostitution, children are trafficked between West African countries and men are forced to work as slaves on Brazilian agricultural estates. These people are enslaved because existing laws are not properly enforced.



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Mary Prince

“Oh the horrors of slavery! - How the thought of it pains my heart! But the truth ought to be told of it; and what my eyes have seen I think it is my duty to relate; for few people in England know what slavery is. I have been a slave - I have felt what a slave feels, and I know what a slave knows; and I would have all the good people in England know it too...”

Mary Prince, the first black woman to escape British slavery in the West Indies and publish an autobiography, *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave*, related by herself, 1831

What is Anti-Slavery International?

The first organised anti-slavery societies appeared in Britain in the 1780s with the objective of ending the slave trade.

In 1807 the British slave trade was abolished by Parliament and it became illegal to buy and sell slaves although people could still own them. In 1833 Parliament finally abolished slavery itself, both in Britain and throughout the British Empire.

In 1839 the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society was created, representing a new organisation for the new chapter of the anti-slavery struggle. It gave inspiration to the abolitionist movement in the United States and Brazil, and contributed to the drawing up of international standards on slavery.

Anti-Slavery International, as it is known today, continues to work for an end to all forms of slavery throughout the world and is the leading organisation in this field.

‘No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.’

**Article 4.
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948**

Slavery past and present

Right:

Bonded labour in the brick kiln industry, Punjab, India.

Whole families are expected to work long hours sometimes night and day for their landlords.



© Pete Pattison

"Slavery... I didn't know about all these forms that existed. I think it's largely because we aren't expecting it. It is hidden. Generally people would not believe that it is possible under modern conditions. They would say 'No I think you are making it all up', because it's just too incredible."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Hull, United Kingdom

Anti-Slavery International is a registered charity 1049160

freedom from slavery is a fundamental human right

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So, what is slavery?

Today a slave has one or more of the following characteristics:

- **forced to work, through mental or physical threat**
- **controlled by an 'employer', under the threat of some form of punishment**
- **dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as 'property'**
- **physically constrained or has restrictions placed on their freedom of movement**

What types of slavery exist today?

Forced labour

Forced labour is any work or service which people are made to do against their will under the threat of some form of punishment.

Descent-based slavery

Some people are compelled to work for others or treated as if they were owned by another person simply because of their caste or ethnic group.

Trafficking

Human trafficking is the movement of people from one place to another using violence, coercion or deception for the purpose of forced labour or sexual exploitation.

Bonded labour

A person becomes bonded when their labour is demanded as the means of repayment for a loan or an advance. Once in debt they lose all control over their conditions of work and what, if anything, they get paid. Their debt is then inflated (e.g. through charges for food, transport, interest on the loans, etc.) often making it impossible to repay and trapping them in a cycle of debt.

Worst forms of child labour

Around 180 million children are in the worst forms of child labour. Of these some eight million are living in conditions which constitute slavery. These are called the unconditional worst forms of child labour and include situations where children are sold, bonded, trafficked, subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, recruited into armed conflicts and forced to work as domestic workers or in a variety of other industries.

Anti-Slavery International is committed to eliminating slavery. You can join the fight for freedom at www.antislavery.org