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REPAIRERS OF BROKEN WALLS*

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Charito† dropped out of elementary school to find work in order to help her impoverished family. She worked odd jobs babysitting or working as a maid, and then she met a woman who promised her a good job in a nearby city. It was, however, a lie.

At just 14 years old, Charito was trafficked to a large entertainment club in Cebu, Philippines. "They treated us like animals," Charito said years later, remembering how she was sold for sex night after night. She added, "I never thought it would happen to me."

Human trafficking erodes the dignity God has intended for his children and our communities. God has made us in his glorious image to display his majesty, but human trafficking converts people, the objects of our Father's affections, into tools for profit and perverted pleasure of the powerful in society.

Perhaps the most brutal form of human trafficking is the massive global business of rape for profit called sex trafficking. Sex trafficking

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†A pseudonym.

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is the recruitment, harboring, provision, or obtaining of a person in order that a commercial sex act can be induced by force, fraud, coercion, or great vulnerability. Trafficked persons—predominantly women and children—are often targeted because of desperation and tricked with the promise of a good job. Some are kidnapped and drugged only to find out upon waking up that they are trapped in a brothel and forced to provide sex to customers. In some instances, victims are sold by family members in order to pay medical bills or family debts. According to UNICEF, nearly two million children are used globally in the commercial sex trade.[1] My colleague, Sharon Cohn Wu, rightly observes that "more than any other human rights abuse I can think of, forced prostitution—rape for profit—tears down the person completely, [and] just strips away who they are."[2]

Human trafficking also breaks down a community's sense of the value of human life. In the Philippines, the on-going, open sale of children for sex is both a sign of their broken down lives and of the community's broken down defenses. This year, the US Department of State correctly observed the sex trafficking situation in the Philippines: "[h]undreds of victims are subjected to sex trafficking each day in well-known and highly visible business establishments that cater to Filipinos' and foreign tourists' demand for commercial sex acts."[3] Over the weeks, months, and years, the public sale of girls and boys and vulnerable women for sex reinforces unspoken beliefs that some people are less worthy of protection, and that some abusers are too strong for the community to stand up against.

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[1]UNICEF, *Annual Report 2006* (published 2007).

[2]Gary Haugen, *Terrify No More: Young Girls Held Captive and the Daring Undercover Operation to Win Their Freedom* (Nashville, Tennessee: W. Publishing Group, 2005), 47.

[3]US State Department, *Trafficking in Persons Report* (June 2013).

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A Fight We Can Win Together

In the tradition of heroic Christian leaders like abolitionist William Wilberforce and transformational leaders like Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King, Jr., International Justice Mission staff, in response to the Bible's call to justice—*Seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow* (Isaiah 1:17)—and together with government and non-government partners in 11 countries, stand against violent oppression. Its founder and human rights attorney, Gary Haugen, launched IJM after serving as the U.N.'s lead investigator into the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide. Moved by how rampant violence led to the death of thousands of innocents, Gary Haugen founded IJM, which seeks to restore to victims of oppression the things that God intends for them: their lives, their liberty, their dignity, and the fruits of their labor. By defending and protecting individuals, IJM seeks to engender hope and transformation for those it serves, and to restore a witness of faith, courage, and redemption in places of oppressive violence.

IJM's clients come from those who have been abused through sex trafficking, sexual assault, forced labor, land grabbing, and lack of citizenship rights. In the Philippines, IJM has been working together with law enforcement, prosecutors, social welfare agencies, and local governments for the past thirteen years to combat sex trafficking and child sexual assault, and in that time has facilitated the rescue of 1,175 victims, the arrest of 621 suspects, and the conviction of 108 perpetrators, including 69 under the Philippine Anti-Human Trafficking Act.

I have been working with our IJM teams in Southeast Asia on anti-human trafficking projects for the past nine years after leaving a legal practice in the United States. When I first arrived in Asia from the US, I hoped that God would allow me to help just a few people with my legal skills. I actually would have been well satisfied with just one. I drew inspiration from Jesus' parable of the good shepherd leaving the flock in order to find the one missing sheep. Over the last nine years, the Father has allowed me and my IJM colleagues, most of whom are Filipinos, to be part of his care for hundreds of those who

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were mistreated and crying out for rescue. Joining with such amazing colleagues in this mission is one of the greatest joys of my life.

The Fight for Dylan. All of us at IJM in the Philippines have closely followed the story of Dylan† and his friends for the past four years. The Philippine National Police contacted IJM in 2009 after they arrested an Australian doctor in the act of sexually abusing a 12-year-old boy in Metro Manila. Further investigation uncovered the sad truth that the doctor had exploited and abused several other 12- to 15-year-old boys for sex.

After the doctor's arrest, the Philippine National Police searched for the remaining victims. Five young boys eventually came forward and revealed to the police and IJM that the doctor had sexually exploited them. IJM made sure all six boys were taken to a government shelter where they started to receive critical care and counseling. IJM social workers also started meeting regularly with the boys.

IJM attorney Lawrence Aritao represented the six boys in court, and he said that the hallmark of the case was the "courage of our clients." Dylan testified against the doctor, taking a very brave stance against a powerful Western man who was respected in the community. The other boys testified in the case against the suspected trafficker who allegedly worked as a recruiter and pimp for the doctor—that case is still ongoing.

Dylan said the doctor took photos and videos of the abuse, and he said that the recruiter threatened to make these images public and create a scandal if Dylan ever told anyone about the abuse. Aritao added that it was the boys' "commitment to seek justice that made it possible for the supporting cast of public prosecutors, social workers, and the IJM team to reach a just result."[4]

On April 18, 2013, the court in Dylan's case pronounced the doctor guilty on two counts of sexual abuse. On April 24, 2013, the remaining

†A pseudonym.

[4]Lawrence Aritao, personal communication (2013).

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five young men sat quietly in the Manila courtroom, flanked by their families and their IJM social worker. IJM's Aritao sat in front of them, waiting for the ruling that would tell the boys that what happened to them was wrong. The judge announced the convictions, completing the victory for each of the young men. At the end of their journey, two criminal courts had sentenced the doctor to serve a combined prison sentence of 10 to 62 years in prison and ordered him to pay restitution between $7,300 and $10,500 to each young man. Before the trial began, none of the boys knew each other. Today, they are close friends, bonded together because of the adversity they had overcome.

The Fight for Charito. Fortunately, like Dylan and his friends, the police rescued Charito and 13 other underage girls who were trapped in the bar with her. But from there the case stalled, stuck in a broken court system. Charito returned home alone, burned by shame and struggling to process the trauma she had endured on her own.

In 2007, a year after IJM opened an office in Cebu, IJM attorneys heard about the troubled case and started working with public prosecutors to move the trial forward. IJM social workers found Charito and helped her move into an aftercare home for the support and trauma counseling she so desperately needed.

Over the next few years, Charito said she "realized the importance of dignity." She also decided to go back to school. She knew it would be difficult, but she said, "I really want to finish my studies to prove to people that everyone deserves a second chance."

With support, Charito felt strong enough to face her trafficker—and the painful memories—in court. "I testified against my abusers so that I can help in giving justice to all who have been victimized and exploited."

The trial finally ended in June 2013—after more than six years. The trafficker was declared guilty. Charito was ecstatic when she heard the news. She said, "It is an answer to my prayers. All this time, I've been praying, 'God, please grant me justice.' This really is a success for me."

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We Need a Wall

These are stories of redemption, of hope, and of the intervention of the Almighty, and they are beautiful. But these stories do not have to keep happening. Rampant sex trafficking, slavery, and tyranny against widows and orphans are not inevitabilities, even in this fallen world. From the very beginnings of human society, God has called ordinary citizens and ordained them to be special ministers who work to restrain evil.

In Romans 13, Paul reminds us that God has established the governing authorities as "his ministers" and as "his servants." He tells us that these ministers are intended "to do you good," and that they are there to "bring punishment upon the wrongdoer."

Of course, what Paul is talking about, in modern speech, is that part of the governing authority that is the public justice system—that system of law enforcers, judges, prosecutors, and social service workers intended to deliver the protections of law to all the people, especially the poor and vulnerable. What Paul is telling us is that this public justice system, which is composed of *God's own ministers*, has a *holy mandate* to *do good* and to hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes. The explicit purpose of this system is to *restrain* evil, upholding the dignity of all people.

The problem is that in the places where we do our work, including some parts of the Philippines, this God-ordained system is *broken*. It does not work, and so what happens? Evil expands, deepens, and engulfs children like Charito and Dylan.

Those entrusted with responsibility to protect the victims are instead feared, and officials who desire to do good do not have enough resources to pay for things like gas in their cars, even if they have cars. On those occasions when they have both resources and the desire to act, they often do not have the skills needed to enforce the law.

Can systemic problems like these be fixed? Most people say *no way*. Let us find other ways to protect the poor and vulnerable. But to really protect the countless victims these systems *must* function.

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The last historic account in the Old Testament has long been one of my favorite stories. It happens in Persia, in the King's Court, with a senior government officer who, amazingly, is one of the Jewish exiles. Nehemiah is at the height of his career. He is one of the highest ranking civil servants in the mightiest empire on the planet.

Yet he is undone. His heart breaks for his people and for his God. A keen student of the Scriptures, he understands the calling of Israel, the intended glory of Israel, and Israel's holy designation as a shining light to the nations, and yet she is decimated. Her population is but a fraction of the stars in the sky that once numbered in her. Her promised land, reduced in size, now comprises an insignificant vassal state in the sprawling empire which Nehemiah serves. Jerusalem, the Holy City, the home of Yahweh's temple, is bereft of its people, its economy, and perhaps most importantly of all, its wall. The wall is down. It is laid to waste. It is reduced to rubble, and in the ancient world, there was no greater indignity to a city than to be without its wall.

So Nehemiah prayed. For four months, he prayed. Then, like any faithful man or woman who sets out on a great endeavor, Nehemiah defined his purpose: rebuild the wall. He laid out a well thought through strategy to achieve it, and then he acted.

Not surprisingly, there were great challenges—not the least of which was that there were not enough people living in the city to actually do the building. Add to that the fact that virtually none of them had jobs that could broadly be classified as related to the construction of large walls. Instead, Nehemiah's corps of builders was comprised of civil servants, nobles, jewelers, merchants, and priests. There was also opposition—armed militia-like bands loyal to local warlords kept the builders under constant threat of attack. The last thing these warlords wanted was a new power in the region based in Jerusalem and behind a mighty wall.

On top of that, there was just plain mockery. Nehemiah writes:

> When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer

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> sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?"[5]

Note here that Nehemiah does not respond at all, and note especially that he does not challenge the accuracy of this statement because he is both godly and patient, and he knows that Sanballat is right. The rocks are sitting in piles of rubble, and they are burned with fire. The only rocks available for mining near Jerusalem were sandstone. It turns out that when sandstone is burned with fire—as would have been done in the many sieges of Jerusalem—it loses its structural integrity.

What Sanballat has accurately observed is that 1) the rocks are already reduced to rubble, 2) the ones that are big enough are burned with fire such that they fall apart when you touch them, and (3) there is no mining operation to get new rocks. It will not work. This wall cannot be built!

Nehemiah does not respond. But I think I know what he was thinking: "Thank you, Sanballat. You are right. But these rocks are the only rocks we have. And right now we need a wall. Our God is with us. And so we his servants will continue rebuilding."

What happened? That wall went up in 52 days.

We Will Continue Rebuilding

As I look at the broken public justice systems in the places where we work, I hear the accuracy of the opposition. But we need a wall, and these rocks are the only rocks we have, and so we his servants will continue rebuilding.

We at IJM have been doing that for a long time now, in places like Cambodia, Uganda, and here in the Philippines, where the system the vulnerable must be able to rely on to restrain evil has not functioned for the poor. But perhaps, just like what Nehemiah's builders found

[5]Nehemiah 4:1–2.

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when they began working, there is a miracle in these rocks and as we build, they are no longer as weak as before. As many have been faithfully praying and pressing on towards seeking justice, we are finding that, in the midst of the rubble of these broken public justice systems, there is strength in the rocks. We have found noble police officers who want to protect the people, prosecutors who really want to win cases against traffickers, judges trying to erase the backlogs in their courts, and social service providers who care a great deal about the quality of care being delivered.

So we are seeing the wall go up. A few years ago, we worked with the Philippine National Police to create, train, and mentor a special anti-trafficking unit in Cebu called the Regional Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force. Today, the officers of the RATT Force are well trained, and they proactively go out to rescue victims of trafficking and to ensure that justice is brought to their oppressors. Because of this partnership, and because they enforce the law, a recent independent study has shown a 79 percent reduction in the availability of minor girls for commercial sexual exploitation in Cebu.[6]

The walls of dignity and protection are going up in the lives of survivors as well. Last February 11, 2014 was the groundbreaking for SafeSpace, a government run shelter in Metro Manila that will provide temporary housing and counseling for survivors immediately after rescue to get them started well on rebuilding their lives. This facility is based on a similar center in Cebu called HerSpace, which IJM created in conjunction with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

Dylan and his friends are working with IJM social workers and other supporters in order to build their own lives. One of the young men is now a sophomore in college, and another has graduated from high school and is working as a junior hair stylist. Dylan and the other boys are working on their high school diplomas. All of the boys said

[6]Edward R. Maguire & Megan Gantley, *Wave 3 Assessment for Project Lantern: Final Report* (Fairfax, Virginia: Crime and Justice Analysts, Inc., 2010).

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that they want to use the financial compensation they will receive from the trial to further their education.

Charito has continued to grow in strength and is now offering support to other survivors. She finished high school and has completed her first two years of college. She participates in her campus anti-trafficking Justice Advocate student organization. She told IJM that she wanted to keep studying so she could become a social worker. "Because I saw that I was loved, my passion to serve was developed," she said.

She has also helped IJM pioneer a program to mentor other young trafficking survivors. She helps them overcome the lies they have been told and adjust to their new situation. She serves as an inspiration for the girls to rebuild their dreams for the future. She anticipates taking on additional responsibilities as part of IJM's volunteer program within the year. "I have experienced what they are experiencing right now," she said, "that is why I can help them."

At a meeting with her fellow mentors creating colorful art together, Charito worked on making her tree. "You cannot have faith in God if you do not have faith in yourself," she said with firm conviction, "God is the source of my life, and he is the source of my strength." The last word she wrote on her tree was "love." With a smile, she said, "This is the most beautiful and wonderful thing that I feel in my life right now, because, since I am loved, therefore I am able to love."

Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble, burned as they are?

The answer is a resounding *yes*. By the grace of God, the walls of protection for exploited and vulnerable people in the Philippines are getting stronger. Filipinos of faith, working together with public justice system officials, God's special ministers of dignity and peace, have a chance to step into their calling as Repairers of Broken Walls[7] for victims of human trafficking.

[7]Isaiah 58:12.

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