

September 17, 2015

New York Times Highlights Photographs of NYC Trafficking Victims

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By Katie Masi

On Monday [The New York Times](#) highlighted the photographs of Xyza Bacani, a former maid and Filipino native, who documented and photographed labor trafficking survivors in New York City. As she learned about the prevalence of labor trafficking in New York, and in the United States generally, she decided to focus on Filipino labor trafficking victims. For three months, she got to know her subjects by sleeping on their couches and learning their routines.

Through Bacani's photographs, we learn the story of Daisy Benin Santos. A job agency lured Ms. Santos from the Philippines with the promise of working at the Grand Plaza Hotel in Branson, MO. Instead, she ended up in debt bondage in Panama, Florida and later found herself undocumented when her trafficker let her visa expire. Santos' trafficker is now in jail and she is employed as a nanny on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

Bacani also documented members of the "Florida 15," a group of Filipino workers who were promised high-paying jobs and forced to pay thousands in recruitment fees. Instead they ended up as indentured servants in high-end hotels and country clubs. Unlike in Santos' case there has been no prosecution because the recruiter cannot be located.

Human trafficking is a global issue that exists everywhere. Traffickers hide victims in plain sight; they are exploited as nannies, maids, manicurists, janitors, construction workers, and in many other industries. As Ms. Bacani states, "It really surprised me that trafficking is happening in a first-world country like the U.S...It also shocked me that even people with college degrees can be victims."

More must be done to increase the risk and decrease the reward for traffickers in this \$150 billion global industry. There must also be uniform guidelines for the identification of labor trafficking cases so that all actors engaged in trafficking, including recruiters are prosecuted. For more information on labor trafficking and what the U.S. can do to dismantle the business, see our [blueprint](#).