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# A call to the next President: 'It's time to make human trafficking a top priority'

By General Charles C. Krulak (ret.), Special to CNN

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Sex slave survivor helps other victims cover brandings 05:08

## Story highlights

- Generation Freedom is a coalition that is calling on the next U.S. President to make human trafficking a priority
- It wants the U.S. government to spend \$3 billion a year toward a coordinated program to tackle human trafficking

General Charles C. Krulak (ret.) is the former commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps and Human Rights First [Bankrupt Slavery Campaign](#) Ambassador. The opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author.

(CNN)In Washington, everyone hates human trafficking. Over the last decade, as public awareness of modern slavery has grown, so too has the U.S. government's effort to combat it. Leaders of both parties have teamed up to pass anti-trafficking laws, and impassioned speeches denouncing the horrific practice are common.

Yet there is a glaring disconnect between espoused ideals and demonstrated commitment. Each year the federal government dedicates [less than \\$150 million](#) to combating human trafficking -- compared to [\\$30.5 billion for the War on Drugs](#).



General Charles C. Krulak (ret.)

Given the size of the problem and the resources of the United States, \$150 million is an anemic figure. The U.S. government spends three times that amount every hour. Human trafficking is the [fastest growing](#) criminal enterprise in the world, [generating \\$150 billion in profits and enslaving an estimated 20.9 million people](#). Beyond these numbers are human beings, including millions of children, forced into sex and labor trafficking, made to suffer. Surely at this point we all agree that there can be no greater affront to a person's rights and dignity than slavery.

To build support for a sufficient financial investment by the U.S. governments, more than 70 organizations are uniting to form an unprecedented coalition called [Generation Freedom](#).

Composed of human rights organizations, social service providers, faith groups, and other anti-trafficking advocates, Generation Freedom will harness their combined grassroots power to press the next President to make human trafficking a top priority.

## **A call to the candidates**

We're beginning our work by launching a petition to the 4 million people already active in our organizations, calling on the presidential candidates to spend \$3 billion each year toward building a coordinated program to take on human trafficking nationwide and around the globe. In the coming weeks we'll hold their feet to the fire through grassroots events, online engagement, advocacy in the media, and direct appeals.

Money isn't everything. An effective battle against trafficking also requires innovative law enforcement, partnerships between government and the private sector, and cooperation among countries. But without a sufficient financial investment, the U.S. government will not be able to crack down on perpetrators, much less bankrupt the business of human trafficking. The effort to eradicate slavery doesn't end with funding, but it begins with it, and that's why Generation Freedom is focusing on it.

Like many global human rights challenges, human trafficking demands American leadership, and those vying to be president should pledge to provide it. By spending real money to combat this problem, the American president would put perpetrators on notice and send a message to allies to also up their investment in the battle to defeat this scourge.

## **Global problem, American problem**

But it's not only a global problem; it's also an American problem. Traffickers operate in all 50 states, all around us, hiding in plain sight: in sweatshops and hotels, brothels and truck stops. And contrary to popular belief, many of the victims are not foreign-born. In fact, it is estimated that [the vast majority of sex trafficking victims in the United States are U.S. citizens.](#)



Branded: Sex Slavery in America -- full documentary 23:30

Trafficking therefore cuts to the heart of the question that should define presidential elections: what kind of country do we want to be? Do we want to allow traffickers to inflict suffering on vulnerable people and corrupt our communities? Or do we want to free people, and ourselves, from this insidious criminal industry, and at the same time lead the way to a more just and compassionate world?

The guiding belief of Generation Freedom is that the richest and most powerful country in the world should do more, much more, to combat human trafficking. Over the coming weeks, we'll find out if the presidential candidates agree.

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