

Viewpoint: End human trafficking now

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On May 11 and 12, The Carter Center will join with Rotarians Against Child Slavery to convene a summit in Atlanta of advocates, nongovernmental organizations, and senior government officials from nine countries to coordinate action to end the sexual exploitation of women and children.

Child sexual exploitation is a worldwide epidemic. It is a crime that needs the attention of many organizations, public and private. It is being addressed by many including our federal law enforcement system. Human Trafficking is also a disaster that Rotary Clubs have chosen to attack with their usual determination and deep commitment.

This problem has horrifying numbers. According to the research by University of Pennsylvania Professor Richard J. Estes and Senior Research Associate Neil Allan Weiner, 300,000 children in the United States annually are the victims of violent and predatory men. Convictions of the "johns" are few and the damage to the youngsters is great. Children sometimes die at the hands of these despicable men and those children who escape death are physically and mentally maimed for life.

The severity of this problem affecting our younger generation is in cities, suburbs, villages, our own neighborhoods. It is a scourge on all mankind that demands attention and prevention. It can no longer be ignored nor "Hidden in Plain View." "Hidden in Plain View" was a report commissioned by Atlanta's Mayor [Shirley Franklin](#) in 2005. When the enormity of the problem in Atlanta and Georgia began to get legislative attention, Franklin asked for the investigation from which the city's "[Dear John](#)" public education program evolved. It was a beginning for the state, but it was not enough to vigorously address all factions of the challenge. This effort needed

partners. It needed a team of dedicated people. Rotary Clubs are now partners and are actively leading with dedication and creativity.

Several Rotary Clubs in the Atlanta area were horrified at the numbers of children who were being victimized annually. Led by a small group of Rotarians from clubs in Fulton County north of the center city, a commitment was made.

They took their cause to the 2014 Rotary District 6900 conference to inform all attendees what was hidden in plain view in their communities. It was not simply the information gotten from reports, it was the public testimonial of a young woman who had escaped from this dark world of big money made from the lives of children.

When the members, chaired by [Dave McCleary](#), past president of Roswell (Georgia) Rotary Club and director for the Americas Rotarians Against Child Slavery/End Human Trafficking Movement, carried their decision to the District meeting, they expanded the number of clubs that joined the effort. The members put time into truly understanding the enormity of this problem of violence against children. Then they began to plan and act. "This 'business' must be stopped! An estimated \$39 billion industry is thriving and prospering globally through the victimization of over 27 million people, 5.5 million of these are children," [Dave McCleary](#) has said to many Rotarians and other potential partners he has recruited to join 'the war on Human Trafficking.'

After attending an event on Human Trafficking hosted by UNICEF USA, Mr. McCleary realized the need to get the largest anti-human trafficking groups together to focus on creating solutions for immediate actions. He then had his boldest thought which resulted in the huge challenge of creating an international partnership to end human trafficking now.

He assembled a committee that was expanded by multiple Rotary Clubs and then recruited other organizations with the same mission. The group has committed to taking the lead in the prevention of this crime by presenting a World Summit to End Human Trafficking on May 10, 11 and 12 at the Carter Presidential Center in Atlanta, Georgia. The former president says, "I am very excited to host the World Summit on Human Trafficking with Rotary's anti-human trafficking movement. Working together we can make a difference."

The World Summit to End Human Trafficking will include speakers,

discussions and materials that can support work done by Rotary Clubs, Shared Hope International, Juvenile Justice's youthSpark, Out of Darkness, United Nations Development Fund for Women, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Center for Civil and Human Rights, Global Business Coalition Against Human Trafficking, and other organizations. Together they have pledged to building the strength of partnerships. Knowing about this community problem, its severity and being vigilant about taking action can make the difference of what happens to a child...no, to many children.

The two days of speakers, panels, discussions and films will have a dramatic closing. On the night of May 12th, the Summit participants, students and other interested individuals will gather at Centennial Park in downtown Atlanta, Georgia for a candlelight vigil for all to honor the 27

million sexually exploited people in the world. You are invited to be among those committed people pledging to vigorously end human trafficking now.