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# How South Florida Modeling Agencies Could Help Stamp Out Human Trafficking

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A 2008 United Nations conference on human trafficking inspired former Ford Modeling Agency CEO Katie Ford to join in the fight against modern-day slavery.

*Credit Christine DiMattei*

Youth sells.

Both in the glamorous world of high-fashion modeling and, sadly, in the dark underworld of human trafficking.

A fake promise of modeling or acting jobs is just one way human traffickers lure young victims -- female and male -- into lives of prostitution or domestic slavery. And now one of the most famous names in the fashion world says South Florida modeling agencies and talent scouts can play a part in the fight against the modern-day slave trade.

Katie Ford is former CEO of the world-renowned Ford Modeling Agency. After selling most of her stake in the agency in 2007, she was asked by a United Nations representative to speak at a women's conference addressing human trafficking.

"I said, 'Why would you want me? I don't even know what [human trafficking] is!'" exclaims Ford. But the UN rep was adamant and Ford says, "After a few hours, I knew why I was there."

Ford says it dawned her during the conference how many parallels there are between how modeling agencies recruit young foreign women and men and the kind of tactics traffickers use to lure people to the United States.

"When I was scouting, I would talk to young women about the career opportunities in New York, about what they could potentially earn compared to other countries," she says. "They would come and they would frequently live with us. However, people who are trafficked, they get duped."

Within a few years, Ford became a global ambassador for the the anti-human trafficking organization [Free the Slaves](#) and founded the Freedom For All Foundation, a non-profit aimed at stamping out human trafficking. "We've partnered with agencies around the world in creating PSAs to warn young people about the dangers of the false promises that are made," says Ford.

Ford was a guest speaker this week at a seminar hosted by [FAU's Center for Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies](#). Also speaking was Katariina Rosenblatt, [a South Florida sex-trafficking survivor and victim advocate](#). Rosenblatt says the vigilance of legitimate modeling agencies is key to fighting modern-day slavery. "There are girls that they are working with who, I'm sure, have been exposed to some form of commercial sex," she says. "There are copycats who are looking at the way they do modeling and turning it around for a much more lucrative business. And that's trafficking."

The United Nations estimates nearly 2.5 million people from 127 different countries are trafficked each year, generating a \$32 billion profit for the traffickers. Experts say Florida is one of the top three destinations for human traffickers in the United States.

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