

ROTARY ACTION GROUP AGAINST SLAVERY

RAGAS NEWSLETTER

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MISSING LINK TRUST

Malcolm Baird, RAGAS Board Member

"If the cries of those who are enslaved around the world today were an earthquake, then the tremors would be felt in every single nation on the continent, on every continent simultaneously." - John Kerry USA Sec of State 2014

MISSING is a direct response to Ms. Leena Kejriwal's experience of over thirteen years (before founding Missing Link Trust) in the grassroot spaces of the rural trafficking belt and the red light districts of Kolkata. One of the biggest observations during her work was - that trafficking is demand driven and the public, the largest stakeholder in the issue of sex trafficking, is far away from it and being part of the conversation.

In communities by our passiveness and inaction, we are also thereby perpetrators of the crime. **Missing Link Trust** was born from the simple idea - of engaging and involving the public on the role they play in trafficking, through the use of art, technology and immersive narratives.

"My explorations of cities and public spaces, as an artist and a photographer, made me enter a red light district in Kolkata in the year 2000, and the experience hasn't left me since. I found myself particularly sensitive to the plight of a girl I was working with, and I further explored her story, as the main subject of my artwork. It manifested as a public artwork titled '**MISSING**' - the iconic **Missing Girl Silhouette**."



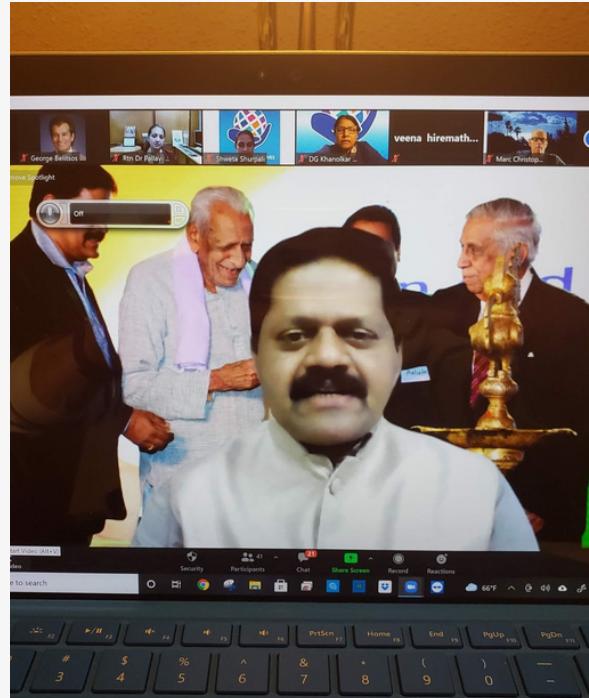
The MISSING Silhouette is a result of intense artistic search, for a visual language, depicting the utter tragedy of the loss of these girls in the dark holes of trafficking. It was launched to great recognition at the India Art Fair in 2014.

Realising its potential to create a powerful public dialogue on the issue, Ms. Kejriwal then started a guerrilla art movement across the country - and the Silhouette became the [Missing Stencil Project](#). It is now a global project with 5000 + stencils across the world. Ms. Kejriwal has since been exploring multiple genres which use art and narratives to engage audiences.

She went on to create the [MISSING Game for a Cause](#). A [mobile game](#) that puts the player in the shoes of a trafficked victim to [build empathy](#) and awareness within each player. In less than a year, the game had over a million organic downloads in 70+ countries.

The initial localization in Bengali organically reached the #1 spot in the [Bangladesh Google Play Store](#) within a week of its launch. It is now available in 12 Indian Regional Languages - it is the first game to do so.

The game has received several global accolades (NASSCOM, MBillionth South Asia, World Summit Award).



INDIA MEETS IOWA

George Belitsos, RAGAS Board Member

Two groups from India recently learned about Iowa's fight against human trafficking.

Iowa Rotary District 6000 Governor, Alka Khanolkar arranged a Zoom training between Iowa and India on July 30th in honor of World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. Governor Alka has made the prevention of human trafficking one of her major goals as Iowa's new Rotary Governor.

The two-hour virtual meeting connected Iowans with the Rotary Club of Seven Hills Dharwad, India. Three US presenters spoke about the progress being made to end trafficking in Iowa.

The speakers included, Teresa Davidson, Vice-Chair of the Iowa Network Against Human Trafficking and Slavery (NAHT), Karen Walkowski, President of the Rotary Club to End Human Trafficking, and George Belitsos, Board Chair of the NAHT and vice-chair of the Rotary Action Group Against Trafficking (RAGAS).



A speaker representing India spoke about the growing slavery problem in his country and how the Covid pandemic has resulted in a recent increase in modern slavery. If one includes forced child marriage, the number of enslaved people in India is nearly 18 million. The Zoom screen photo below shows the speaker from India, William Christopher. He serves on the India High Power Committee on Human Trafficking and Bonded Labor.

Alka informed the Seven Hills Dharwad Club that she has formed a District 6000 Prevent Human Trafficking Action Team. This Action Team is providing awareness training for Rotary Clubs and community groups in Iowa.

The Action Team plans to engage Rotary clubs in sponsoring anti-trafficking projects. Governor Alka and 3 other District 6000 Rotarians are also members of RAGAS and are serving as RAGAS Good Will Ambassadors. The Rotarians in India were encouraged to become members of RAGAS.

Shirlee Reding, NAHT Board Member and Chair of the Central Iowa Service Network Against Trafficking (CISN) made a second virtual presentation on human trafficking to a group of human trafficking professionals from India. These participants were invited to connect with Iowans by the International Visitor Leadership Program of the U.S. Department of State.



The U.S. Department of State outlined the following specific objectives for the project:

- Examine efforts to combat trafficking in Iowa, including crimes against women and children, by examining the formulation, administration, and enforcement of policies at the international, national, state, and local levels;

- Present innovative strategies for preventing, investigating, and prosecuting trafficking crimes;
- Explore Iowa initiatives to recognize, protect, and assist victims of abuse and trafficking, including social and economic reintegration services;
- Discuss awareness and education efforts and share strategies for international cooperation in combating trafficking in persons.

Shirlee shared some major anti-trafficking Iowa projects over the past several years. She told them about our efforts to get Iowa legislation passed that would allow law enforcement to closely monitor the activities of their local massage businesses because of the sex trafficking that occurs in some of them. She also talked about the hotel/motel employee training project. This project was started by the Rotary Club of Ames, Iowa, and has now gone statewide.

Through their discussions, it became apparent neither of these programs is something they are currently doing in India but she sensed both were eye-opening. She further got the impression it was something they intended to bring back to their superiors as something worth pursuing.

After Shirlee's presentation Chief David Lorenzen spoke about the various anti-trafficking projects at the Iowa Department of Transportation. Chief Lorenzen also presented information on the anti-trafficking projects of Truckers Against Trafficking.



THE FIRST OF 5

Melissa C. Covarrubias

***Names have been changed to protect the identities of victims.**

As humanity advances and levels of violence increase, the number of disappearing boys and girls continues to increase as well. The number of people affected, which increases day by day, doesn't just include the victims themselves, but also their family members and loved ones. Each number is a part of a history, a human life, that was torn from its roots for inhumane and perverse destinies.

In mid April, Ms. Maria G. lost contact with her daughter Teresita. At first she assumed that her daughter was with her father. After a few fights and discussions it was decided to search for the minor at the fathers home which was unknown at the time.

They soon found out that the father had a relationship with Edwin C., whom he allowed his daughter to date once in a while and who she appeared to maintain a relationship with, according to Maria.

The mother of the victim started searching for her daughter, and in the process suffered health problems, stress and depression. She eventually started searching in the city of Zihuatanejo, Guerrero. At the beginning authorities appeared to be doing their job and following up on the case, but with no results. in spite of the mother's insistence, risking her own life.

Her petition was ignored and two months went by before she received help, thanks to Mayara R.V.G. from the Red de Colectivas Feministas of the Estado de Michoacan. Eventually they came into communication with the feminist activist Melissa C.C. who used her connections to find and help the minor.

On Sunday, June 13th of this year, the minor was located and found in the hands of Edwin C. who declared being her boyfriend. What really happened? Had she been a victim of human slavery? There has been a lack of interest to answer these questions and to reach the truth.

The minor was found in territories controlled by armed groups dedicated to trafficking illegal substances and people. Rescuing the minor required powerful influences, but we are talking about a much bigger problem We're talking about corruption, normalization of violence, and those cultural standards which permit a constant violation of human rights, under the premise of "it's allowed", "it's normal for criminals to be associated with people of power", "police are also criminals."

Serious accusations that were corroborated. The feminist activist M.C.C. knew that, so she avoided contacting local and national authorities, instead she asked for help from international organizations. On Saturday, June 12th she got in touch with RAGAS Rotary Action Group part of Rotary International who in turn activated their alliance with the A21 group, later on through organized chats she obtained the necessary help to mobilize certain authorities.

Melissa C.C. and the child's mother realized at some moment that they were being followed when entering the Fiscalía General del Estado de Michoacán but didn't know who would be affected by the child's rescue. 24 hours after international organizations intervened and with the help of feminist activists, the minor was located.

This is a real example of what can be done with everybody's participation and rapid action. Teresita was the first child of 5 found alive. Sadly other children have not been so fortunate.

M. C.C. Has followed up on this case and couldn't help feeling helpless hearing the different forms of torture this girl went through. She had no communication with anyone, her so-called "boyfriend" tortured her when he was bothered, he tried to choke her 4 times, he had her tied in chains to a bed to prevent her from escaping, and when they went out she would go with him. She knew that sooner or later he would kill her.

Teresita's story ended well because she was rescued on time.

For now, both she and her mother are receiving psychological help.

The truth is that the rescue would have never been possible without the help of Viviana Pozzuto (Rotary District 4895), Cinthia Chediak (RAGAS South America Coordinator, Dave McCleary (RAGAS Global Chair), Angie Luna (A21 Latin America Coordinator), Mayara Rashib Vigil Guevara (Red Colectivas Feministas de Michoacán), Anna Guerra (Comisionada Estatal de Atención a Victimas en Comité de Construcción de Cultura de Paz en el estado de Guerrero), Karen Aguilar (Colectiva Feminista Baubo Ultrapurpura), and Melissa Covarrubias.

Love for the cause, dedication to making this world a safer place, and a desire to help. This story is an example of success obtained through international cooperation in humanitarian objectives can save the lives of innocent people.



FORBES INTERVIEW: MATT FRIEDMAN

Our work has had the distinct honor of having been featured in Forbes Magazine for the second time.

Matt Friedman, RAGAS Board Member and CEO of The Mekong Club, was recently interviewed by Diana Tsai about the recent progress that The Mekong Club has made in the fight against modern slavery.

This interview was published in a September 16 Forbes article titled, "This Is Where You'd Never Expect To Find Modern Slavery." As we've come to expect, Matt did a phenomenal job representing The Mekong Club and RAGAS on a large stage. Well done, Matt!

[Find the full article here.](#)



ZONE INSTITUTE: ZONES 25B & 29

Karen Walkowski
2020-2022 President
Rotary Club to End Human Trafficking

As some of you know, our club in partnership with RAGAS was asked to coordinate both a Plenary session and a breakout session focused on what Rotary can do to End Human Trafficking at the Rotary Zone 25B and 29 Zone Institute. For those of you who are not familiar with the Rotary International organizational structure, Zones are regional areas that are represented by our Rotary Board of Directors. The Zone 29 covers the Central U.S. region (North Dakota to Western Wisconsin and all the way down to the Mexican Border). Because our club is sponsored by a District located in Minnesota, we are included in Zone 29. The Zone Institute is designed as a training for District Governors, District Governor-Elects and District Governor-Nominees.

Michelle Seets, Dave McCleary and I have spent several months pulling together impactful presentations and incredible speakers who joined the panels of presenters. Despite of several challenges including last minute changes to speakers and Dave unable to join us in Houston, both the plenary session and the afternoon breakout session made a significant impact to the almost 1,000 people in attendance with incredibly powerful presentations and dialogue between the speakers.

The morning speakers covered all aspects of the anti-human trafficking movement. They shared their lived experience in working for years on anti-trafficking efforts and dove deep into the four P's, prosecution, prevention, protection, and partnerships to help Rotarians see how they could engage in the fight against this crime both in the United States and abroad.

Susan Coppedge- Former Ambassador At Large. US Department of State-Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons

Donovan Palmer- Chief Strategy Officer: Hope for Justice

Ashlie Bryant-Co-Founder and CEO: 3Strands Global Foundation

Rachel Fisher-Survivor Leader with a B.S. in Nursing specializing in ER and Forensics

We were also privileged to have Minal Davis, Director of the Houston Mayor's Office of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence welcome the Institute attendees and issue a Proclamation declaring September 11 at Rotary Day to End Human Trafficking.

The afternoon speakers/panelists covered prevention and how clubs can activate their members to stop the crime before it starts.

Ashlie Bryant-Explaining the PROTECT program that received the Rotary Global Grant awarded to fund prevention education

Minal Davis-Providing a summary of the many initiatives and policies that have been created in Houston to combat human trafficking

Nicole Perry- Trial Lawyer and partner at Jones Day Law Firm, describing the initiatives that this large law firm is supporting in leading over 20 pro bono initiatives and partnering with the City of Houston.

Rick Naylor- yes our very own Rick also had the opportunity to highlight the program that his organization has created for high school students.

It was so humbling to join these amazing leaders and to begin what I hope will be strong partnerships going forward.

Thank you to Dave for his partnership AND for securing the speakers. Thanks to Michelle for all the hard work she did to organize the day, keep everyone updated and make sure that we could present a powerful presentation to represent our club and RAGAS.

This day was clearly a great example of what we can do to end Human Trafficking when we join in partnership with others!



MINA CHIANG - ROTARY SOUTH BREAKOUT

Saturday, October 2

RAGAS Board Member Mina Chiang has been selected to lead a breakout session at the 2021 Rotary South Conference on Saturday, October 2.

Mina will be leveraging her extensive experience in modern slavery, forced labour, and human rights issues across a wide range of UN bodies, governments and NGOs to empower young attendees to combat modern slavery through local knowledge.

Find out more [here!](#)



NEW PODCAST: LABOR OF LOSS

Winrock and USAID Asia have launched a new podcast series entitled "Labor of Loss."

This series explores experiences of human trafficking and labor exploitation across Asia, taking listeners on a journey from a fishing fleet in South Korea to a palm oil plantation in Malaysia to a brick kiln in Cambodia. Guests – ranging from trafficking survivors to frontline responders and legal rights advocates – will share their stories, debunk common misconceptions, and dive into a complex world of human exploitation – and hope.

Read more about Winrock's work and listen to the podcast [here](#).



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RAGAS communication

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LOOKING FOR A WAY OUT?

帮助您的方法 / ESTÁS BUSCANDO UNA SALIDA? / NECESITAS AYUDA?

STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING

NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE
888-3737-888
or Text "Help" to 233733(BeFree)
IOWA VICTIM SERVICE CALL CENTER
800-770-1650

IT HAPPENS HERE IN IOWA or Text "iowahelp" to 20121

Iowa Network Against Human Trafficking & Slavery
www.iowanaht.org

TAKE ACTION

We are not defined by who we are, but by our actions. To contribute to ending modern slavery, you can:

- Become a RAGAS member from [here](#).
- Donate to RAGAS, or organisations working on ending modern slavery.
- [Contact your local Coordinator](#) to volunteer for RAGAS.
- Invite a RAGAS speaker to your local club meeting talking about modern slavery.
- Initiate a Global Grant project to fight against modern slavery.
- Engage with Rotary clubs that dedicates to ending modern slavery, including District 5950 [Rotary eClub to End Human Trafficking](#) and District 5710 [Rotary eClub of Community Action Against Human Trafficking](#).

