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Ursuline Academy

Kirkwood Human Rights Commission Contest

### Slavery: Not Really Abolished

On December 6, 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment was passed which abolished slavery in the United States of America. President Abraham Lincoln spoke in the Emancipation Proclamation, and stated, "All persons held as slaves within any States, or designated part of the State, the people whereof shall be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free." However, it may come as a surprise that slavery, in one form, is still prevalent in the United States today. Human trafficking is a pressing issue in the world, as it is a form of slavery that uses violence, threats, force, and coercion to make someone do some form of labor or sexual act (Homeland Security). This widespread issue is present throughout the entire world and must be put to an end.

Human trafficking is an issue on the international level and can occur in any community. Victims can be any age, race, or gender. Traffickers use various tactics to lure victims into their crime. Often, violence, manipulation, romantic relationships, and false promises lead the victims to feel as if they have no other choice than to give into the trafficker (Homeland Security). To make matters worse, victims often cannot reach out for help because of certain barriers in the way. For example, violent threats from the traffickers and language barriers prevent victims from

seeking help (Homeland Security). Once they originally give into the crime, victims usually find themselves in a never ending cycle of violence.

Human traffickers often look for vulnerable people who would be the easiest to lure into their horrific ways. They look for those who are enduring psychological or economic hardships, those without a social “safety net”, and people who were greatly affected by natural disasters. The United States Department of State estimates that 49.6 million were experiencing trafficking at any given moment in 2021, which includes forced labor and forced marriages. It is all the more important to know the signs of a trafficker, to keep yourself and others safe. Traffickers often will try to lure potential victims with promises of drugs, force, or financial control. They pressure victims into various jobs or sexual acts in return for shelter and food. “Traffickers will often prey on runaway or at-risk youth, and they are good at manipulating, deceiving, and controlling child victims” (“Identifying Sex Trafficking Victims and Perpetrators”). Because of the prominent risk of human traffickers in society today, it is increasingly important to be aware of the potential dangers and how to stay away from it.

According to Fox 2 News, the FBI conducted a sex trafficking mission called “Operation Cross Country”. The FBI in St. Louis worked with organizations in St. Louis and throughout the nation to find and identify sex trafficking victims, specifically children. This annual investigation strives to help the found victims and find suspects. The agencies associated with “Operation Cross Country” found thirty-seven missing children, the average age being fifteen years old and the youngest being only eleven. Eighty-five suspects were identified and charged with child sexual exploitation or human trafficking offenses (Rothman). Jay Greenberg, the special agent in charge for the FBI St. Louis Division stated that most children trafficked were lured online. The

FBI ended up saving over eighty children from sex trafficking, with five being from St. Louis (Rothman).

Human trafficking is a pressing issue that has absolutely no benefits. It is a violent abuse of other humans and threatens safety and security, completely undermines governmental laws, and impairs the lives of innocent individuals everywhere. Human trafficking is the most important human rights issue today because it puts millions of people into danger, violates rights, and encroaches on countless peoples' freedom. Victims of human trafficking are exploited and stripped of their safety. The US Department of State explains, "Traffickers profit at the expense of their victims by compelling them to perform labor or to engage in commercial sex in every region of the United States and around the world." Human trafficking is a unthinkable horror that occurs each and everyday in the United States and world. It must be stopped once and for all, for the sake of the innocent people who have been deprived of their lives.

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### Breaking the Chains of Inhumane Factories

Inhumane factories in third-world countries have been a growing concern in recent years. These factories, which produce goods for consumer markets in more developed countries, have been known to exploit their workers through terrible working conditions, low wages, and lack of basic human rights. These conditions are placing factory workers in a state of modern-day slavery.

One of the most significant issues in these factories is the poor working conditions. Many of these factories are overcrowded, poorly ventilated, and lack basic safety measures such as fire escapes. This results in workers being exposed to hazardous materials and dangerous machinery, leading to a high rate of injury. Even further, many of these facilities lack resources such as clean drinking water and restrooms.

Another major issue in these factories is the exploitation of workers through low wages. Many of the workers in these factories are paid only a few dollars a day, despite working long hours. This leads to them struggling to afford basic necessities such as food or housing. However, this isn't limited to just adult workers. Many of these factories have been known to use child labor and forced labor. Workers

are also often subjected to verbal and physical abuse, and are also denied the right to form unions or protest their working conditions.

However, the consequences of these inhumane factories in countries don't stop there. Workers in these factories are not only subjected to inhumane working conditions and low wages, but also often have long-term health problems, and are stuck in the cycle of poverty for their entire life. These factories also negatively impact the local communities, since the workers are unable to afford basic necessities, and are therefore unable to contribute to the local economy.

Consumers can help play a role in combating this issue by choosing to buy products that come from sustainable and humane companies, and also urging companies to be more upfront with the source of their labor. Governments can take action by enforcing laws that protect workers' rights and by blocking companies from violating these laws. Organizations can work to help break the cycle by supporting laborers and their families.

In conclusion, inhumane factories in third-world countries are a serious issue that needs to be addressed more seriously. These factories exploit workers through poor working conditions, low wages, and lack of basic human rights. The consequences of these inhumane factories are long-lasting and far-reaching, not only for the workers but also for the local communities. It is crucial that consumers, governments, and organizations take action to combat this issue and ensure that workers are treated with dignity and respect.

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## The Freedom to Help

Human rights have been constantly oppressed throughout history by tyrannical leaders and oppressive empires. The only way to fight for human rights is by standing up and voicing objection to the oppression. The right to freedom of speech is the most important human rights issue currently because of the role speech plays in protecting other human rights. Freedom of speech includes the right to express yourself in any way that is not detrimental to others with the intent to harm. Freedom of speech toes a fine line and is critical to helping solve other issues.

The brutal Uyghur genocide in China has little coverage and lots of reporting is pushed under the rug. Former Premier League soccer star Mesut Ozil, of Turkish and German descent along with practicing Islam, took a stand for the Uyghurs. He tweeted out support and was outspoken in public fighting for the cause. He was told his career would suffer and his reputation as well. He was quickly pushed out of Arsenal, the British soccer team he played for. Chinese broadcasting companies refused to air Arsenal games. Arsenal separated themselves from the comments Ozil

made. He was left on the bench and out of matchday squads before eventually terminating his contract and sending Ozil to Besiktas JK in the Super Lig of Turkey. His downfall from grace was an upsetting one for many fans but his words excited supporters of Uyghur Muslims.

Although Ozil's words were legal and fair, internal money and companies from China compelled the Premier League and Arsenal to attempt to silence Ozil. While Ozil used his ability to speak up for other human rights violations, his own personal right was indirectly silenced. This is only one example of the importance freedom of speech plays in our world in relation to other human rights.

Freedom of speech has been a cornerstone of many human rights movements of the past. The civil rights movement in the late 1950s to the late 1960s was led by uniting leaders using the freedom of speech in their battle. The March on Washington was a historical congregation of civil rights supporters. Spearheading this event was Martin Luther King Jr. He addressed the crowd of over 200,000 people and gave his legendary "I Have a Dream" speech. This was a turning point in the civil rights movement and shortly after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed. This example of freedom of speech opened the door to the protection of many different human rights including abolishing disenfranchisement and segregation. Freedom of speech was critical to helping a huge battle for equality.

Protecting freedom of speech is of the utmost importance due to the attention it can bring to other human rights issues. Jamal Khashoggi was a Saudi reporter who was very critical and outspoken on the Saudi crown. He spoke out against their oppressive laws and ruling and was critical of their human rights violations. He was assassinated in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul,



Turkey. After an investigation into his murder, the Saudi government admitted the murder was premeditated and further investigation revealed the crown prince of Saudi Arabia authorized his murder according to an intelligence report released by the Biden administration in 2021. This revelation further confirms the power speech holds. While freedom of speech is a guaranteed right in most countries around the world, efforts by oppressive governments still work to silence speech, specifically raising awareness for human rights, by stopping any further statements or words from outspoken citizens. Khashoggi's story brings light to the lengths countries will go to limit freedom of speech, even to people outside of their country.

In conclusion, freedom of speech is the most important human rights issue in a world where speech protects and fights for other rights. America was built on the freedom of speech showing how important the freedom of speech is. Every day we must fight to protect human rights and the freedom of speech always anybody to continue the fight.

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### Silenced Cries

Freedom to practice one's religion is a right, not a privilege. But as a Muslim girl living in America who is aware of the oppression less fortunate Muslims around the world encounter simply because of their faith, it feels like a privilege. Though I am free to practice my religion in peace, it pains me to know that many Muslims are barred from this fundamental human right. Religion is as innate to many individual's identities as their existence, but in China, this right is being stripped away. Uyghur Muslims face oppression from the Chinese Communist Party, which seeks to eliminate all Islamic influence from their country through ethnic cleansing and assimilation. The genocide of both a people and a practice spanning fifteen million Uyghurs makes this conflict the most dire human rights violation of our time.

After the Holocaust and heinous atrocities committed against Jews during WWII, the entire world was left chanting two words: "Never Again." And yet, despite evidence of ethnic cleansing in China, our world leaders have failed to prevent atrocities and blatant human rights violations from transpiring, turning only to condemnation as a course of action. This leaves the Chinese government free to commit, as the UN states, "international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity." Undercover reports, satellite footage, and first-hand survivor accounts reveal China's despicable treatment towards Uyghurs and expose the cruelty carried out in concentration camps.

China justifies the removal of an entire culture by claiming they simply wish to combat “terrorism.” Those who engage in Islamic traditions, such as growing a beard or wearing a headscarf, are labeled as terrorists and face lifelong imprisonment in concentration camps. In these camps, prisoners labor tirelessly in cotton fields and factories, women are injected with drugs that leave them permanently sterilized—a tactic used to limit the Uyghur population, Uyghurs undergo brutal torture for refusing to renounce their religion, and children are separated from their families and put in orphanages where they are “re-educated” and forced to forget their identity. In order to survive, Uyghurs must practice their religion in fear and secrecy, or give it up completely. However, the Uyghurs have committed no crime, and it is inhumane to assert this much control over them when they are not engaging in actions that disrupt peace.

The generalization of all Muslims as terrorists has a harmful effect on Muslims everywhere, not just in China. Recently, my brother, who is a middle schooler at North Kirkwood, was called a terrorist simply because of his Islamic name. This negative stereotyping was not only upsetting for my family and me—it is the reasoning behind the senseless deaths of thousands of Uyghurs. It saddens me that the actions of a few allow countries like China to label two billion Muslims, or twenty-five percent of the world’s population, as terrorists. How ironic then, that this very excuse is used by China to justify terrorizing millions of Uyghurs.

What China is doing today is morally unacceptable. In an effort to assert control over their country and strengthen their government, they have resorted to oppressing their own people. They continue to erase all evidence of atrocities, punish those who dare to speak up, and imprison those who have hope. But the blood spilled on Chinese soil will never be washed away. The Uyghurs’ culture and religion cannot be erased, and their struggles will never be forgotten.

China can try to suppress the Uyghurs’ cries for freedom, but the world can still hear them. History will always remember the silence of those who chose to do nothing, and inaction in the face

of this genocide is a stain on our conscience. Statements of condemnation are not enough. We must go as far as to place economic sanctions on China, as human lives rank higher than economic endeavors, not to mention, many of the goods China produces are a result of the forced labor of Uyghur Muslims. If world leaders continue to allow China's crimes to go unpunished, they will remain free to continue their cultural genocide. Failure to step up now will only serve to set a precedent for other countries, who will gain the confidence to commit similar crimes against humanity without ever having to answer for them.