

# **Friday Imoluamen**

ID: UD61350HS070401

## **Human Right 4: Freedom from Slavery**

ATLANTIC INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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## **Introduction**

Conditions prevalent and leading to the two world wars inspired the proposition, drafting and acceptance (approval) of the contents of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the European Convention on Human Rights of 1950. These documents capture the essential rights of man of which the right to freedom from slavery is part. Some of the rights, if not all, have been entrenched in the constitutions of every country in the world. The Nigerian Constitution, for instance, stipulates that no citizen of the country should under any circumstances be subjected to slavery or servitude in any form. It is also emphatic in stating that there should be no justification for infringement on the privacy of any individual as to constitute slavery, but where such occurs, it must be subjected to litigation in pursuit of justice for the victim (Nigerian Constitution, 1999). This provision is akin to what is found in the 1948 UDHR document. A cursory examination of UDHR reveals that forced labor, inhuman treatment and denial of rightful property are subsumed in enslavement. Article 4 of the document stipulates that no individual has any right to make another individual a slave.

In Europe and elsewhere, slavery was initially spearheaded by Britain, Spain and Portugal as they made incursion into territories outside their natural domain. In the centuries past, men scholars and revivalists among who were Samuel Johnson, Daniel Defoe, Adam Smith, John Wesley, Jean-Jacque Rousseau, William Wilberforce and Henry Thornton had advocated, from the humanitarian perspective, the abolition of slavery throughout the world. With modern civilization, and explosion of knowledge and technology, slavery ought to be an event of the past, and not to be repeated or continued in any form. But in almost every part of the globe, as it stands currently, slavery is still being engaged against the expectations of humanitarians.

## **What is slavery?**

Slavery has its origin in the transatlantic slave trade of the 1800s. But some researchers have traced it to Bible event times since records of slave keeping can be found in the Bible. However, in modern times, it has assumed new dimensions in spite of civilization brought about by education, research and technology (Lawal, 2020). Nonetheless, slavery is a medieval atrocity which de-enfranchises an individual from personal dignity, integrity and sense of belonging. Africa in particular experienced the devastating effects of black slavery. The United States, Brazil and many other parts of the world have records of loss of lives and mental trauma, arising from slavery. Africa lost a significant proportion of its population to slavery in the centuries past. Besides the forced separation of individuals from their families and homes, never to be seen again is a grave psychological trauma.

Slavery is the demonstration of power possessed by another individual to intimidate, subjugate and compel another to work under his/her whims and caprices by virtue of

superior advantage. Slavery is tantamount to oppression and denial of human identity. It is an ungodly and unethical way of turning one person or many persons into 'property for possession,' use, and to perpetuate the interest of the owner, whatever the interest may be. Education has exposed the debauchery of slavery, revealing the equality of all men before God and the law. An individual that is enslaved loses human identity. It is likened to psychological imprisonment, physical bondage and cessation of personal control of direction. The only hope of such persons is liberation either by divine intervention or civilized stakeholders.

Slavery is absolute denial of a person's human rights in society. It is de-humanizing and mentally subjugating. It is the erosion of an individual's independence and encroachment on personal choice to take decisions. The action of enslavement turns victims into mere property of the actor. It is likened to suppression of the individual's identity, ego, and neglect of emotion. Statistics are diverse and inconclusive on the trends of modern slavery at the global level. The International Labor Organization (ILO) report has it that around 89 million people have been involved in some forms of slavery (OHCHR, 2022)

When is an individual enslaved or how do we know when an individual is under slavery? Individuals, by virtue of their nature and in-built ability to make personal decision on primary issues of life, should be able to demonstrate such ability without fear, restriction or intimidation from another individual, irrespective of their position. However, if the contrary is the case, then the individual is under slavery, having lost the freedom to make free choices without the influence of another. Slavery is perceived to be in operation when an individual is perpetually subject to the decisions, orders, influence and power of another to the extent that such individual can no longer, for the time being, exercise his/her will power. Slavery suggests the existence of a master-servant relationship in which the servant is bound by force, not by his/her freewill, to honor the master's desires, emotions and prejudices.

### **Manifestation/Forms of Slavery**

Since the years of forced slavery before the independence of many nations, slavery has assumed many dimensions exemplified as follows:

- Human trafficking
- Forced labor
- Conscription into the army without the individual's consent
- Illegitimate imposition of power by the military
- Indoctrination
- Mental slavery out of ignorance
- Sex slavery
- Child abuse
- Brutality

- Economic slavery
- Exploitation of the poor for personal gains
- Autocratic regimes and their actions against the masses (Raphael, 2020)

Examples of slavery abound worldwide. The current action of Russia against Ukraine is modern slavery in disguise, which has been condemned in absolute terms by members of the international community. This further illustrates the definition of slavery as forced encroachment on the independence of another by means of severe attacks, violence and disregard for sovereignty or right to liberty (New York Times, March 2022). There is still evidence of human trafficking from Africa to Europe for prostitution and forced labor under agents whose principal interest is economic gains.

Furthermore, activities of the Taliban government and fundamental Islamic nations could be seen as a mix of slavery and terrorism against humanity in modern civilization. Slavery is equally captured in the economies of developing and less-developed countries, which are still tied to some advanced economies by virtue of trade/import dependence. The economic or bilateral relations between certain African countries and their colonial masters are skewed in favor of the advanced economies. Where the trade surplus is perennially in favor of the foreign economic powers such that the developing countries continue to depend on the powers for economic survival, then modern economic slavery is presumed to thrive. This is what some economic scholars have termed neo-economic slavery.

### **Proposed Steps against Modern Slavery**

The United Nations and European Community have recognized the devastating effects of slavery in all forms and ramifications. They have made some significant efforts at identifying, exposing and stopping slavery. But, stopping slavery is a collaborative measure. Nations that subscribe to the elimination of all forms of slavery will have to take the political will to act in that direction. It is imperative to criminalize slavery and all acts of slavery. There is also need to step up a global campaign against slavery. This effort needs to be spread through all nations of the world. In doing this, the role of human rights activists is critical. Human rights activists can create a community link for the fight against slavery and prosecution of culprits across the world.

Promotion of human rights education at all levels in all countries is vital. United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) is well-equipped to spearhead human rights education through its member countries. Fresh awareness has to be created to extend rights education to the grass roots levels in all countries of the world. It would be necessary to involve civil society organizations since they are significant stakeholders in the fight against slavery. Their presence is more visible, considering the moral values that they pursue. Furthermore, professional social workers should see the challenge of modern slavery as a major issue to handle with counseling and sympathy for victims of slavery. In essence, social workers in their training and

professional practice should not only step into the fight against slavery, but make their services available to victims of slavery.

The United Nations needs to establish a special body with the responsibility of monitoring compliance with international ethics, conventions and protocols to the elimination of slavery in all forms across the globe. Surveillance of the international seas is recommended to avert and arrest the perpetration of slavery under any guise. In this present dispensation, the international police, by the initiative of the United Nations, could be given a fresh mandate to detect and arrest perpetrators of slavery across all continents. However, this initiative will require the support of government leaders in all member countries of the United Nations.

### **Conclusion**

Slavery does not promote individual development neither does it allow the victim to pursue the fulfillment of destiny. While it has been established that slavery is crime against humanity, all stakeholders across the world need to collaborate to eliminate slavery. The challenge, however, is found with influential individuals who may not totally act in support of fighting slavery since they draw some benefits from slavery. Similarly, some nations may not be totally disposed to apply all measures against slavery since they are, to an extent, encumbered by other socio-economic and political problems. Of significance is a worldwide campaign to bring awareness of the need to end slavery. Every citizen has a role to play to report, or bring to light whatever appears like slavery in any form. To this extent also, rights education should be part of the school system all over the world.

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