

Latin American Human Trafficking and Its Toll

Written by Robert ID3150

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At a time when immigration issues are on the minds of many and on the U.S. legislators' front burner, a new documentary, 'Lives for Sale', looks at the underbelly of illegal immigration, including the black-market trade in human beings.

The documentary's executive producer, Maryknoll's Larry Rich, says the production strikes at the heart of the immigration debate.

"The same grinding poverty that drives people to risk dying of thirst in the desert in search of a job in the U.S. is the reason people will expose themselves to the danger of being enslaved. Both are born of desperation."

Each year more than one million people risk their lives attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border searching for a better life and to escape devastating poverty. 'Lives for Sale' juxtaposes the "American Dream" with the perilous journey followed each year by desperately poor Central Americans and Mexicans. Women are especially vulnerable to a black market that preys on human beings, as illustrated by two powerful individual stories that emerge: A young Mexican woman and a Guatemalan girl fall victim to human trafficking, their lives shattered by sexual slavery.

According to Rich, human trafficking is now the third largest illegal industry on the planet, after drugs and arms smuggling.

"Most people trafficked are enslaved as laborers. A Florida sheriff's deputy told me it may look like simple prostitution or domestic servitude, but if you dig deeper, you'll see it is a stark crime on many levels," Rich says.

"These victims may harvest our food or do our gardening, or earn our disapproval as prostitutes, but we do not realize they are, in fact, slaves."

'Lives for Sale' also exposes the ploys human traffickers use to entrap their victims in a

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flourishing immigrant-smuggling network. The cross-border journey is fraught with dangers ranging from robbery to debilitating injuries and death. These stories are brought to life, told by the immigrants themselves, people who help them along the way, human smugglers and law enforcement officials.

To see an excerpt from Lives for Sale visit <http://www.livesforsale.com>

Lives for Sale premieres on PBS stations in January 2007. Check local listings for airdates and times.