

Boots on the Ground

By Bazzel Baz

“My organization works directly with victims. We are “boots on the ground.” The truth of the matter is, a child does not come home, a person being prostituted is not rescued, a child porn site is not shut down, and a pedophile is not brought to justice until there are boots on the ground, physically doing something about it.”

Human trafficking is on the radar of most conversations these days. The topic itself is a trophy piece for many celebrities and organizations seeking attention. But for those of us in the midst of the fight, it is more than that. It is a reality that blankets the very soul of our daily schedules. Right when we think we've figured out how to bring this ugly business to a close, we get slammed by an abnormality. It is that subtle bit of corruption within the ranks of those very organizations that claim to be concerned about the issue of human trafficking, that claim to be advocates for exploited people.

As the founder of the Association for the Recovery of Children, I have spent more than my share of years rescuing abducted, missing and exploited children, and cross-referenced enough organizations to determine who is who in this battle. Within the last fifteen years, I have witnessed the rise of anti-slavery "awareness" groups in America. It has become fashionable to be associated with the cause, even financially lucrative to create "awareness," but let us not forget the real victims behind the story. Awareness has its proper and necessary place

in a democratic society that has the legislative structure for voters to affect policy changes. However, I think extra support should be given to organizations that work directly with victims. I give keynote addresses at anti-trafficking conferences, and I often ask provocative questions to the audience: "When was the last time your organization pulled a prostitute off the street, stopped her/his pimp from retaliation and found a safe house for her/him to be restored as a healthy human being? Or, when was the last time you entered the field and brought back an abducted child? Or, when was the last time you shut down a porn supplier involved in child exploitation?" While I recognize that not all organizations work directly with victims in these capacities, I ask these provocative questions to remind the advocacy community that in midst of creating awareness, of which we do need much more, we should not become those who exploit the victims.

I am the founder of the Association for the Recovery of Children (ARC), a non-profit composed of former military and intelligence agents, which physically rescues

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children from capture. I understand the financial support that is required for a non-profit to be sustainable—sometimes we pay out of our own pocket to finance our missions. If you plot the trend of awareness about human trafficking, what you see is a line that continues to rocket skyward. To the untrained eye that would appear to be only a good thing, but to those who work directly against trafficking, there is room for concern. Don't get me wrong, I think we need more awareness of human trafficking because it's such a big problem. However, America is a capitalistic economy that is driven by trending customer interests. This is advantageous for social justice advocates, because it helps build interest by disseminating a message into people's daily lives. The problem is that it can become an empty ploy, drawn up by marketers who pull on the heart strings of their clientele, never really giving much back to the social justice cause. While we do need more awareness about this huge problem, we also need to be accountable.

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first-hand that awareness is not enough to stop the problem, though it has an important place. While not everyone can do the often dangerous work that ARC is doing, I want to encourage people to do what they can for their communities. Volunteer your time at rehabilitation centers; ask your local police department if they have anti-trafficking training for their officers; write emails, make phone calls, make donations, and partner with those who work directly with victims.

The Association for the Recovery of Children is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization composed of former intelligence, military and law enforcement agents dedicated to the safe rescue of abducted, missing and exploited children. We operate in foreign and domestic territories and do so at absolutely no cost to the custodial guardians. Do you have boots on the ground?

Bazzel Baz is founder of the Association for the Recovery of Children. He is a former CIA Special Operations Paramilitary Case Officer. Previously, he was a Captain in the U.S. Marine Corps, and graduated from The Citadel, the military college of South Carolina.