

Human Trafficking: The ugly face of slavery showing up in sophistry

Having separated with her husband five years ago, Sarah* (27) was left alone in the care of her two minors. Their marriage had irrevocably broken down, with no communication between Sarah and her ex-husband. The little maintenance stipends that she received monthly was not enough to cater for the school fees, food and general upkeep of the children.

Sarah was always stressed. She had tried applying for a job in many companies but always received some 'regret' responses. Across the Limpopo River, her childhood friend seemed to be doing well, albeit working as a maid.

One day, as Sarah was scrolling through her cellphone, she stumbled upon a WhatsApp advertisement of domestic workers being wanted in the Middle East. The package was so attractive. The advertiser was offering a handsome salary with allowances and an annual holiday travel package. She joined this WhatsApp group and followed some testimonies of those who purported to have been assisted by the agents to move to the Middle East. They all testified that indeed their lives had changed for the better after moving to the Middle East.

Sarah had a valid passport but had no money to raise airfares. She already visualised her life changing for the better, staying in her own house and driving that posh car.

The headache of raising the air ticket was not an issue as the agents promised to pay for the travel expenses and visa fees. Everything seemed easy and Sarah made contacts and started her preparations to go to Oman.

It took her two months to process all travel arrangements and was seen off at Robert Mugabe

— By Robert Zvidza —

International airport by her cousins. The journey was smooth and was met at the destination by a young man who told her she was sent by the employer to pick her.

Sarah was taken from the airport to an exclusive posh suburb where upon arrival, the alleged employer confiscated her passport and cellphone. That is when Sarah realised that she had jumped from a frying pan onto a raging fire. The job was there as promised, but the salary a paltry stipend. Sarah soon realised that her dream was crumbling right before her. She worked for long hours, sometimes not being given food or allowed to go out of the walled yard. She could not take any off days.

Slavery!!!

The story of Sarah depicts actual situations that many Zimbabwean women find themselves subjected to when they travel to the Middle East in search of employment. In the recent past, such cases have been on the rise, with relatives engaging the Zimbabwean Government to intervene and try to repatriate victims back home.

From December 2021, there has been an upsurge in suspected cases of Trafficking in Persons of young women to Oman. The trafficking is being perpetrated by agents who recruit desperate people on the pretext of securing them lucrative employment opportunities as domestic workers. The targeted people are invited to join different WhatsApp groups for maids seeking jobs. Upon joining the groups, they are offered lucrative salaries ranging from USD400-500 and good working conditions. The agents then pay for tickets and visas for the victims. Unknowingly, the victims who fall prey to such tricks only realise upon arrival when their travelling documents are confiscated.

The victims who have been rescued so far indicated that they were subjected to labour exploitation earning no pay or only an equivalent of USD50 per month, physical and emotional abuse. Apart from that, the agents also demand large sums of money equivalent to about USD3000 as refund for processing their visas and air tickets. As of now about 18 Zimbabweans have reached out to their families and the



The ugly face of human trafficking equates to slavery. Photo: courtesy of <https://www.unicef.org/>