



Small narrative as a way to prevent human trafficking in East Nusa Tenggara Province-Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

There is a belief that small stories or testimonies from former migrant workers can provide new insights to anyone who wants to become a migrant worker to avoid being trapped in human trafficking syndicates. Efforts to combat the modus operandi of human trafficking, namely fraud, can be avoided because there is new knowledge sourced from the real experiences of former migrant workers. Therefore, in completing this research, the main problem is how can former migrant workers avoid human trafficking syndicates? This main problem is analyzed philosophically using Lyotard's perspective. In answering the main problem, we conducted in-depth interviews with former migrant workers. After the data was collected, the data was analyzed and presented again in a narrative. The purpose of this study was to find out how former migrant workers can avoid human trafficking syndicates. The results found that there are former migrant workers who did not become victims of human trafficking because, first, they dared to surrender themselves to the police in the destination country of work. Second, migrant workers from NTT did not become victims of human trafficking because they have family in the destination country who work as foremen. Third, migrant workers from NTT were avoided because they had a good attitude. Fourth, there is a connection with the origin community at the destination. This research can contribute to efforts to raise awareness among individuals seeking to become migrant workers to avoid human trafficking syndicates.

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1. Introduction

This research examines alternative prevention strategies based on short stories from former migrant workers. These short stories are actually the real experiences of the migrant workers themselves. We then call these real experiences "small narratives," using a term introduced by philosopher Jean-François Lyotard. The former migrant workers we are referring to here are former unprocedural migrant workers. The reason we chose former unprocedural migrant workers is because they are vulnerable to exploitation, and the characteristic of human trafficking in East Nusa Tenggara itself is unprocedural migration. Many people in NTT choose

to become unprocedural migrant workers. Data from the East Nusa Tenggara provincial government shows that public interest in becoming migrant workers remains high every year (BPS, 2024). Furthermore, the data presented by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) only shows procedural migrant workers. Accurate data on unprocedural migrant workers is lacking, and in reality, many people still choose to become unprocedural migrant workers. To help these unprocedural migrant workers, the real experiences of former migrant workers are collected and then disseminated to help prospective workers escape from these human trafficking syndicates.

The purpose of this research is not to support undocumented migrants, but to bridge the gap between the desire to become migrant workers and the procedures for becoming one. Migrant workers who have already become undocumented migrants can learn from the experiences of former undocumented migrants how to avoid human trafficking syndicates. Naturally, experience is the best teacher, and the life experiences of others can also contribute to perspectives. To support awareness-raising efforts, short narratives are materials that can be disseminated to prospective job seekers to help them avoid human trafficking syndicates. Awareness-raising materials extend beyond legal issues, the dangers of undocumented labor, or empowerment efforts, but can also draw on the real-life experiences of former migrant workers. Research by Erlina Erlina and Helmi Syaifuddin on the implications of Lyotard's concepts found that Lyotard's concepts have impacted how society understands and conveys knowledge (Syaifuddin et al., 2024). The real-life experiences of former undocumented migrant workers can have a significant impact on job seekers, enabling them to escape human trafficking. Because of these positive impacts, the small narratives of former migrant workers are urgently needed for research and dissemination.

Human trafficking in East Nusa Tenggara appears to involve complex, overlapping methods. Generally, the first method is to employ someone as an Indonesian migrant worker (Nola, 2023), (Purnomo, 2024) and (Ramhania et al., 2023). This means that someone is made a migrant worker and then exploited. The exploitation often experienced by people in NTT is forced labor. Labor exploitation means someone works but is not paid or is paid a very low wage. The second method is document falsification. Travel documents, including KTP (identity cards) and passports, are falsified, often referred to as "aspal/asli tapi palsu" (authentic but fake documents). The third method is to offer free travel from the point of origin to the destination, as well as the cost of processing travel documents. The fourth method is fraud. This is considered fraud because it promises a high salary at the destination, but this is not the case in reality. The fifth method is cultural fraud. This mode is a way to gain approval from people in positions of authority by offering a certain amount of money, often called betel nut money or okomama (Angelie Angelie, 2023).

Dominggus Elcid Li, in Yakobus Fahik (2021), stated that fraud is the most common modus operandi of human trafficking in NTT (Fahik, 2021). Previously, Pertiwi (2018) also found in her research that fraud is a common modus operandi used by human trafficking syndicates to deceive victims (Pertiwi, 2018), and (Utami, 2019). A crucial question is why NTT people are so easily deceived? To answer this question, the ultimate answer is undoubtedly the lack of knowledge of NTT people themselves about human trafficking. Faced with this ultimate answer, this study aims to broaden the understanding of NTT people themselves about human trafficking and how to avoid it by using the experiences of former migrant workers. Testimonies from former migrant workers can provide insight and knowledge for other prospective job seekers.

In fact, numerous preventative measures have been taken to prevent someone from becoming a victim of human trafficking. Since 2014, the IOM (International Organization for Migration) has emphasized the importance of safe migration. Safe migration is a human rights-based approach that recognizes that migration is everyone's right. The term "safe" refers to the need for a migrant worker to possess the necessary documents and requirements at their destination.

Working as a migrant worker allows a person to work because it is their right, but they are also required to possess documents such as a passport, visa, and a clear employment contract.

Katharine Bryant and Todd Landman (2020) in their paper on "Combatting Human Trafficking since Palermo: What Do We Know about What Works?" outline preventive measures that can be taken: first, addressing context-based risks: to reduce vulnerabilities exploited by traffickers, create safer migration routes, and strengthen social safety nets. Second, improving data and research: improving data systems and enhancing learning to develop quality standards for interventions. Third, business transparency and economic empowerment: by cleaning up supply chains and strengthening banking system barriers, we can reduce the conditions that facilitate trafficking. Fourth, strengthening the legal framework: enforcing legal standards and disrupting trafficking networks with targeted seizures and prosecutions. Fifth, improving awareness campaigns: conducting targeted awareness campaigns tailored to local contexts to educate the public about trafficking indicators and reporting mechanisms. Sixth, service provision and coordination: improving victim identification, enhancing the quality of support, and strengthening victim-centered responses. According to them, these actions, if implemented effectively, can contribute significantly to the prevention of trafficking (Landman, 2020) and (Shinkle, 2007).

A study conducted by Janie A. Chuang stated that the protection of migrant workers is achieved through the use of global migration law. This is crucial for preventing human trafficking because global migration law can be used to facilitate human mobility so that migrant workers do not have to give up their freedom to be exploited (Chuang, 2017).

A study by Juita et al. stated that preventing human trafficking from a criminal policy perspective can be achieved through three main strategies: first, criminal policy emphasizing law enforcement; second, non-criminal policy emphasizing prevention, victim protection, and increasing legal awareness; and third, integrative policy encouraging cross-sectoral cooperation at the national and international levels (Juita et al., 2025) and (Saffanah & Putra, 2024).

Research conducted by Deanna Longjohn outlines four dimensions of prevention aimed at preventing human trafficking from occurring in future generations. The first dimension is primary prevention, which focuses on preventing trafficking before it occurs. The second dimension is intervention prevention, which aims to end exploitation that has already occurred and prevent further abuse. The third dimension is victim recovery. And the fourth dimension is disruptive prevention, which aims to train more people to play a role in the three prevention dimensions mentioned above (Longjohn, 2022) and (Savoia et al., 2023).

Apart from that, there are also efforts by the Indonesian government to prevent criminal acts of human trafficking. Indonesia has initiated the Bali Process forum as an effort to address criminal cases of human trafficking, modern slavery, and irregular movement of persons. In 2014, Indonesia also signed the ASEAN Convention on Tracking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Rustam et al., 2022).

The government has also established a task force to address the prevention of human trafficking (TPPO task force). This task force functions to achieve effective prevention and handling of human trafficking crimes. Research conducted by Adeodata Laniria Carla Mbiri and Yakobus Fahik (2024) on this task force in North Central Timor Regency found that this task force functioned through the work of each unit that joined the task force, but experienced internal obstacles, namely sectoral egos and also bureaucratic politics itself. The bureaucratic politics in question included transferring someone already familiar with the issue of human trafficking to another location and replacing them with a new person, so the work of the task force began from scratch. The main obstacle to this task force was the lack of face-to-face dialogue to build trust between each unit that joined, making the results of this task force difficult to evaluate (Mbiri, A. L. C., 2024) and the others researcher said the task force has not been optimum due to its coordinative characteristic and the existing Indonesia migrant workers placement system

that has been failed to protect the practice earliest stage in disagreement with the human trafficking preventive measures (Nugroho, 2018), (Ramhania et al., 2023), and (Susilawati et al., 2024).

The government, through Law No. 18 of 2017, has also provided a comprehensive basis for protection for migrant workers both before leaving, while working abroad, and after returning to their country of origin, namely Indonesia. There are also prevention efforts through grassroots awareness-raising through community education. Research by Yakobus Fahik (2021) states that community education is one method that can be used to prevent human trafficking (Fahik, 2021).

In light of these efforts, we utilize short stories from former migrant workers to support these prevention efforts. These short stories from former migrant workers are analyzed using a philosophical approach introduced by Jean-François Lyotard, namely small narratives. Small narratives are stories or perspectives that are more local, more specific, and do not claim absolute truth. The small narratives introduced by Lyotard aim to show that truth and the validity of truth in today's postmodern society are not based on universal claims but are based on more local, more specific, more unique, and contextual knowledge. With small narratives, Lyotard emphasizes the importance of diversity and multiplicity in understanding knowledge and truth, stating that in the postmodern world, we must be wary of single and comprehensive explanations and instead welcome many voices and views (Lyotard, 1979). Lyotard states that knowledge is not metaphysical, universal, or transcendental (essentialist), but rather specific, related to space-time/history (Ranuhandoko, 2014). The prevailing narrative in this context is that becoming a migrant worker will improve one's life, making them less critical of the trafficking *modus operandi*. This broader narrative is countered by the smaller stories of former migrant workers about how they managed to escape the trafficking *modus operandi*. These little story is good knowledge for other people to avoid human trafficking syndicates. This is another approach in an effort to fight the *modus operandi* of human trafficking itself, namely fraud, because proper knowledge is the way to prevent human trafficking itself. Fraud can only be avoided through correct knowledge. And to gain true knowledge, someone can learn from the testimony of other people who have experienced it. Programmatic theories assume that when prospective migrants are equipped with information about risks, they will make more-informed choices, ultimately resulting in safe migration (Suyin et al., 2020). Therefore, the stories of these ex-migrant workers are explored, narrated, and disseminated as a form of increasing awareness and knowledge. For this reason, the main question is how ex-migrant workers can escape human trafficking and/or how migrant workers who were initially victims of human trafficking can safely return to their areas of origin. So the aim of this research is to find out how unprocedural migrant workers do not become victims of human trafficking and at the same time collect stories from ex-migrant workers to use as a way to prevent human trafficking.

2. Method

This research is qualitative. According to John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, qualitative research is "a study that begins with assumptions and uses interpretations or a theoretical framework to analyze a real-life case" (Creswell, 2014). The real-life case in this study is the experiences of former migrant workers. These experiences are then interpreted using Lyotard's framework to achieve the objectives of this study. The data collection method we used was in-depth interviews with former migrants. We sought former migrant workers working in Malaysia on palm oil plantations and as construction workers. Malaysia was chosen because Malaysia is a destination country for migrant workers from NTT. Meanwhile, the migrant workers' workplaces are palm oil plantations and construction workers because these two types of work require only muscle but are also vulnerable to exploitation. Before conducting the interviews, we explained our purpose and asked for their willingness to be respondents in this study. We also sought out ex-migrants in the buffer zone, encompassing North Central Timor

Regency, Belu Regency, and Malaka Regency. This buffer zone refers to H.G. Schulte Nordholt's perspective in Mikhael Valens Boy's article in the daily Pos Kupang on "A Glance at Biboki-TTU, Nekaf Mese, Ansaof Mese: A Socio-Cultural Review" (Boy, 2021). For the purposes of this study, the buffer zone areas in question are Oenopu, Oekopa, Lurasik, Sukabitetek, and Nurobo. In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 ex-migrant workers who were willing to share their experiences and serve as samples in this study. The sample was determined using a nonprobability sampling/purposive sampling method, meaning that respondents (informants) were not selected randomly but were determined by the researcher based on certain qualities (Abunawas, 2023). The particular qualities referred to here are workers working in Malaysia and originating from the buffer zone. After the data was collected, it was interpreted using Lyotard's framework and then described and presented narratively to answer the main question: how can former unprocedural migrant workers avoid becoming victims of human trafficking in their destinations and return safely to their countries of origin? In addition to interviews, we also collected data from books, journals, and news articles related to the issue we are researching.

3. Analysis and Results

The findings of this study consist of short stories or experiences from former migrant workers working in Malaysia. Their stories are presented as they were to provide a comprehensive picture for other prospective migrant workers. These former migrant workers' experiences can serve as a reference for prospective migrant workers to escape human trafficking syndicates

3.1. Dare to Surrender Yourself to the Malaysian Police

According to Aristotle, courage is a virtue and a middle ground between cowardice and recklessness. This virtue was then lived out by Adrianus Kono and Daniel Kusi. They dared to surrender themselves to the Malaysian police so they could return to their hometown. Adrianus Kono recounted how he left for Malaysia in 2002. He was promised work in construction. He worked there for a year and a half, but he didn't know how much money he received as a monthly salary. All the money was managed by the captain because he had to repay all travel expenses from his hometown to Malaysia. While working in Malaysia, he was only able to send five hundred thousand rupiah once to his wife and children back home. When he wanted to send a second time, he couldn't because he fell ill. The money he wanted to send had been exchanged from ringgit to rupiah. The money had to be exchanged back from rupiah to ringgit to treat his illness. To treat his illness, he could only buy medicine at a shop/kiosk. This was because he lacked a passport or visa. He also recounted that to survive, he and his friends collected scrap metal. Scrap metal refers to used but still salable items. A kilo is worth five thousand rupiah. Under these circumstances, he and nearly a hundred of his friends mustered the courage to surrender to the Malaysian police. By surrendering, they hoped to be sent to Indonesia. This hope was finally fulfilled. They were able to return to Indonesia. He also testified that by reporting themselves, they were handcuffed and closely guarded, but they were still able to receive adequate food and all travel expenses from Malaysia to East Nusa Tenggara were covered. They traveled free of charge. No travel expenses were covered.

3.2. Have a family member who works as a Malaysian foreman

Dominggus Ane is a former migrant worker who, during his time in Malaysia, experienced no physical violence or low or no pay. He recounted his time in Malaysia from 2012 to 2016. He ventured there because his uncle worked there as a foreman or tekong. He entered Malaysia using a travel passport and worked in construction. He was treated specially there. He was picked up at the border and received his full salary during his time there. Unlike other migrant workers who had to repay the entire travel cost from their place of origin to their destination, he received his promised salary throughout his time there. He endured this situation until he returned home.

3.3. Have a Good Attitude

Good character will bring success to oneself. Diligence and honesty are two qualities that every worker must possess. Agus Ulu experienced this. He left for Malaysia at a very young age. When he left in 2000, he was only 16 years old. He was able to escape to Malaysia because his family helped smuggle him into Malaysia. During his time there, he worked as a laborer on a palm oil plantation. While in Malaysia, he was able to send money to his parents in the village and also send his younger siblings to school. This motivated him to work in Malaysia. Furthermore, he still saved some of his money as capital for his future business back home. Upon his return, he was able to purchase a tractor, a motorcycle, a spray tank, and a water pump. These are the agricultural tools he acquired from his travels. And now, he has chosen to become a farmer in his hometown.

He explained why he was safe and comfortable while working there because he was diligent and honest. Waking up in the morning, he went straight to work. His work exceeded the work target. He is also honest. Do not take or sell just any palm oil to other people. He said that there were other workers who secretly sold the harvested palm oil to other people, and he didn't do that. Therefore, he was able to survive. He did not experience stories about salaries not being in line with promises or salaries held by the foreman. All salaries are received in full according to the agreement with the employer. He even asked his foreman to help him arrange documents, including passports and visas. He holds all the documents. Unlike his other friends, there are documents, but the boss holds them.

3.4 Always be in the Community

The community referred to here refers to family ties within a region, such as the NTT family ties. If the community is too large, find a smaller one, such as a village, sub-district, or regency. This is important because it increases bargaining power. This is what Lius Lak and Norfi Bauk recounted. They said they can work for the highest wages because they have a strong bargaining position. When they work and are paid poorly, they all go on strike. By going on strike, their demands can be met. This is all because they are part of a community or association.

By being part of a community, they feel protected. No one or boss will exploit their labor. This community can also protect fellow members who lack documentation. When, for example, there's a raid by the Malaysian police, those without documents hide, while those with documents remain at the pondok. The police who arrive won't suspect them because everyone in the pondok has complete documentation.

3.5 Be Selective About Your Workplace

Being selective about where you work is also important because it affects your salary. In Malaysia, oil palm plantations can be owned by companies, the Malaysian government, or individuals. According to Frid Asbanu, the salary is high when working on a government-owned oil palm plantation. Frid stated that he only started saving money when working on a government-owned oil palm plantation. When he first started in 2004, he worked on a company-owned oil palm plantation. There, he was paid very little, earning just one ringgit for five palm fruits. When he worked on a state-owned oil palm plantation, he was paid well. One ton of palm fruit fetched twenty-seven ringgit. He said that being paid by the ton was very profitable. For a 50-100 kg oil palm, he only needed 10 to 20 fruits to earn 27 ringgit.

3.6 Shop at Official Store

People working illegally in their destination countries can easily be tricked, not only by having their wages set according to their employers' wishes, but also by fulfilling their basic needs. Lius Naben and Okto Molo recounted that while working in Malaysia, even though they were undocumented migrant workers, they always tried to purchase necessities from official kiosks. They would not buy goods illegally. "Illegal" here means goods purchased from unauthorized individuals or kiosks. Buying illegally can inflate the prices of basic necessities, but if purchased

from official kiosks, the prices meet the standards set by the Malaysian government. The Malaysian government implements a single-price system. With this single-price system, prices are the same in both urban and rural areas. This system prevents sellers from profiting from consumers, but rather from the company.

3.7 Awareness of Documents

One way to be safe from becoming a victim of human trafficking is to take care of the documents after arriving at the destination. That's what Anton Lan did. When he left in 2009, he went illegally to Malaysia and worked on a palm oil plantation. After arriving in Malaysia, he did not immediately process his documents. He still had to hide in the barracks in the palm oil plantation where he worked. He said that after working for a year, he asked his employer for help in processing his passport and visa. The risk is that he will have to pay a heavy price. He had to pay five thousand ringgit. The price is returned in installments, namely by deducting the monthly salary. According to him, even though it is expensive, he can still go everywhere safely because he has documents. He doesn't have to hide anymore and can work safely and comfortably.

An analysis of the real experiences of migrant workers from Lyotard's perspective is as follows: Lyotard himself was a French philosopher skeptical of absolute and singular truth and instead believed that truth is diverse. This is inseparable from the current situation where the meaning and message of grand narratives are unstable but change over time. Furthermore, he believes that knowledge production does not originate from a single institution, such as a university or religious institution, but can be produced by anyone. Consequently, truth is diverse and fragmented, as well as local and contextual. Therefore, he emphasizes sensitivity to differences in order to be able to accept diverse small narratives. Lyotard argues that these grand narratives tend to ignore the diversity and complexity of human experience, and overlook local aspects and individual differences that may have a significant influence on social development (Alfiana, n.d.) and (Aritonang, 2024).

With this emphasis, the real experiences of former migrant workers are an attempt to illustrate the complexity of human trafficking itself. In the context of human trafficking, the complexity lies in the modus operandi of human trafficking itself and the very weak protection system. Faced with a weak protection system, the most feasible solution is to raise awareness among each individual. Those who work must know how to save themselves, not wait for others to save them.

Therefore, collecting small stories is part of unraveling the tangled thread of migrant worker protection. Real-life experiences are highlighted and disseminated so that job seekers can learn how to save themselves from becoming victims of human trafficking. The real-life experiences of former undocumented migrant workers should be seen as individual, but are believed to have a significant impact on job seekers' self-protection. Job seekers know how to save themselves from human trafficking syndicates.

The courage to surrender to the Malaysian police, for example, from the experiences of Ardianus Kono and Daniel Kusi, can provide new insights for undocumented job seekers so they can unafraid to surrender to the Malaysian police. The fear of being tortured, treated harshly, whipped, or even imprisoned is knowledge that is not necessarily true. It turns out that by surrendering, they were able to survive and return to their home countries.

The experiences of Lius Lak and Norfi Bauk provide an important note: being part of a community provides a sense of security, comfort, and can increase bargaining power. Employers cannot afford to underpay their labor.

Being selective about employment is also important, as Frid Asbanu's experience demonstrates. Being an unskilled worker doesn't mean someone can't find a job with decent pay. And her experience shows that working for a government-owned company can earn decent pay.

A good attitude also contributes to the safety of an undocumented worker. Honesty and diligence, as Agus Ulu experienced, kept him safe while working in Malaysia. Misconduct, such as stealing oil palm fruit, would have put him in danger. Furthermore, purchasing basic necessities at shops/kiosks/official figures is a wise choice because it saves money. The option of obtaining documents at the destination is a good idea. Changing one's status from illegal to legal status, even if the cost of processing the documents is very high, is not always true.

In the context of human trafficking, the prevailing narrative that someone who follows undocumented procedures is automatically a victim of trafficking is not always true. Such claims are exaggerated, viewed only from a legal perspective. The real-life experiences of undocumented migrant workers demonstrate that they can still survive. There are exceptions that can lead to their survival. Presenting such real-life experiences does not imply support for workers who follow undocumented procedures or disregard existing prevention efforts; rather, it demonstrates another method of prevention. In the context of raising awareness, these experiences are material that needs to be disseminated. Real experience is the idea of maintaining an internal balance between a legalistic approach and the desire to obtain decent work and legal protection for job seekers. To borrow Lyotard's words, the small narrative is solely to maintain an internal balance of knowledge. He said, "I do not mean to say that narrative knowledge can prevail over science, but its model is related to ideas of internal equilibrium"(Lyotard, 1979). This means that the experience presented is to maintain a balance between the rights of job seekers and the demands of procedures that must be followed in the workplace. Unprocedural workers are procedurally wrong, but they also have the right to safety and personal protection. Prohibiting them from leaving work due to incomplete documents would also be excessive, while the need to obtain decent work is undeniable. Common and frequent practice is that official documents are only given to skilled workers. Workers from NTT are unskilled workers—workers who only have muscles. And Malaysia is a country that still accepts these unskilled workers for employment on palm oil plantations. Another advantage that makes Malaysia a destination for unskilled workers is language. Malaysia and Indonesia both use Malay. These conveniences are what make NTT people make Malaysia their favorite destination.

From Lyotard's perspective, the lived experiences of former migrant workers are a source of knowledge. Migrant workers are producers of knowledge. Sources of knowledge are not limited to experts or universities. The lived experiences of former migrant workers affirm Lyotard's own notion of small stories. In Lyotard's view, small stories are unique and local. And all the experiences collected are unique and local, specifically for workers from East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) working in Malaysia. When forced to migrate to other regions, the results may differ, as each region has its own unique characteristics. Furthermore, other migrant workers working in Malaysia will certainly not experience similar outcomes, but they have been given many options. Therefore, the purpose of collecting these experiences is to expand those options. An unprocedural worker can have the choice of either surrendering to the police or having to produce documents. These options remain available to them. Without these options, workers remain vulnerable to exploitation.

4. Conclusion

From Lyotard's perspective, the short stories described above are crucial for increasing knowledge about undocumented migrant workers. These stories can support the desire to become migrant workers and the vulnerability of becoming victims of human trafficking. Anyone who wants to become a migrant worker can learn from the experiences of these former migrant workers to avoid human trafficking. To raise awareness, these short stories from former migrant workers can serve as material for public dissemination as a preventative measure. Using Lyotard's approach, the experiences of former migrant workers are seen as small narratives, as they contain unique aspects that can be learned and serve as a source of information to prevent someone from becoming a victim of human trafficking. From the

experiences recounted above, the following points emerge: First, have the courage to surrender to the police in the destination country. Second, ensure that you have a well-placed family at your destination. Third, have a good attitude. Good character is well-liked anywhere. Fourth, stay connected to your community. Being part of a community is essential for those far from family. Being in a community ensures safety and prevents exploitation. Fifth, you must take care of your paperwork upon arrival at your destination. Sixth, be selective about where you work, and seventh, purchase essential goods at authorized locations. These points are among the ways to prevent human trafficking.

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