

# 'You only have your body'

**Rebecca Lee speaks to Nepalese human traffic survivors about their abusive pasts and hopes to curb an ever growing humanitarian crisis**



Rebecca interviews Indira Gurung

**"Sometimes I feel guilty. It's sad. I don't understand why we don't get basic human rights. We don't have education, the right to healthcare or job opportunities, it's very depressing," 30-year-old SASANE President Indira Gurung explains, tears welling up in her eyes. "Some women only have one thing, and that's their body. They have no choice but to sell it."**

Indira is one of many survivors of human trafficking in Nepal, a prime country for sex traffickers. A form of modern day slavery, sex trafficking is defined by the United Nations as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."

SASANE is one of many NGOs fighting an ever growing human trafficking crisis. The facility is based in the city of Kathmandu, the heart of Nepal. Nepal is one of the poorest, least developed countries in the world with

thousands of Nepalese women and young girls subjected to sex trafficking in India, the Middle East, Malaysia and Hong Kong each year. SASANE, otherwise known as 'The Sisterhood of Survivors,' was founded in 2008 by trafficking victims in order to help rescue females from the vicious sex trade circle and enable them to learn new skills and qualifications to gain employment as paralegals and tour guides. Women are quite often saved from sex slavery through raids on brothels otherwise known as homes or by escaping themselves.

Indira is one of many Nepalese women at the facility who has been subjected to years of sexual, physical and psychological abuse. In Nepal traffickers see buying women and children as a high profit, low risk solution to living on the breadline. Trafficking occurs on a daily basis for many reasons such as poverty, low levels of education, gender discrimination and a lack of awareness and employment opportunities. Indira explains how she was forced into slavery.

"I was trafficked from the age of 13. An agent brought me to a home in Kathmandu and promised my parents they would provide me with a good education and a job and they were false promises. After seven years of suffering endless abuse I got introduced

**"I am unmarried and find it really difficult to trust people"**

to the now Director of SASANE. We got together, I escaped and filed complaints and soon there was a group of 70 women willing to fight trafficking here. The Director taught us paralegal skills and we decided to form a group to help others."

But what are the conditions in these homes like? Are parents genuinely unaware of the abuse and never-ending terror they entail for their children? Indira adds, "My family sent me to a broker who brought me into Kathmandu. I was then taken to a home where I had to work morning, day and night without food. Trafficking is illegal in Nepal though many people don't think it's a crime. Parents normally know the traffickers in person who tell them their daughter is fine and they (the parents) believe them. Mothers and fathers think they are doing the right thing and often never know what's going on, receiving pay each month in return and cash bonuses on special occasions like Easter."

Although Indira managed to escape and now has her own family she says it hasn't been easy trying to maintain regular relationships.

"It is very hard for me to have a normal family life. I have a five-year-old daughter with my husband who grew up in our community and thankfully he is very understanding of my past because not everyone is."

Kabitha Khadka (22) is another young woman in SASANE who was subjected to trafficking in Nepal. Her horrific experience as a sex slave is something she finds difficult to speak about.

"I was very young at the time and I don't feel comfortable talking about it. It is very hard for me to have a normal family life. I am unmarried and I find it really difficult to trust people following my experience."

She escaped the sex trafficking trade with the aid of SASANE who trained her to become a paralegal. Today she spends her days helping other survivors speak out in the district court.

"The government and society need to collaborate more to stop human trafficking, laws simply aren't reinforced in Nepal and it's just no good."

Although there is a lack of information on the extent of human trafficking in Nepal, UNICEF reports an estimated 12,000 children are trafficked to India alone for sexual exploitation each year, some alarmingly as young as eight or nine years of age. The organisation also says it estimates that around 13,000 girls and women are currently working in the 'night entertainment industry' in Kathmandu. Concern over families selling their daughters and sometimes sons has been magnified further due to many Nepalese people being left homeless and