

We must all join the war against the modern slave trade

A horrific report has revealed that human trafficking, especially of children, is rampant in South Africa, writes **Vincent Mukhathi**

THE shocking report on human trafficking released by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) recently has made South Africans aware of a crime phenomenon that has hitherto not been regarded by some as a serious problem.

The report stated that victims of human trafficking are women and children, who are trafficked for a variety of purposes including prostitution, pornography, domestic servitude, forced labour, begging, criminal activity (including drug trafficking), and for the removal of body parts (or muti).

The HSRC report, which was released at a National Prosecuting Authority conference in Cape Town on human trafficking last week, came amid serious media reports of incidents linked to human trafficking in South Africa.

The recent conviction of two men by the Durban regional court on charges related to human trafficking — under the Organised Crime Act — is a clear indication of the commitment by South Africa's law-enforcement agencies to counter the threat.

Basheer Sayed and Somcha-

ree Chuchumporn were convicted for transporting, accommodating and employing women from Thailand, who worked as prostitutes in Umbilo, KwaZulu-Natal. The two men will be sentenced on May 10.

The SAPS has put measures in place to squash organised crime syndicates involved in child trafficking ahead of and during the World Cup which begins on June 11.

The country's security agencies, led by the police, cognisant

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that child traffickers may want to prey on children during the world football spectacle, will be out in full force to ensure that children receive the protection they deserve.

To curb child trafficking, we implore everyone in society to take full responsibility for the safety of children.

The police will be working closely with various communities, security agencies, government departments and non-governmental organisations to curb

crimes against children.

Traffickers use tactics like deception, intimidation, job offers, threats and force-feeding with drugs with the intention of gaining control over the victim.

Other tactics may involve parents selling their children in order to pay off their debts or gain income.

In some cases, parents may even be deceived by promises of training, education and a better life for their children.

According to the US State De-

partment Trafficking in Persons Report released in June 2008, about 12.3 million people worldwide have been victims of trafficking.

The report indicated that South Africa is a starting place, transit and destination country for trafficked men, women and children. It also stated that women and girls from other countries were trafficked to South Africa for commercial sexual exploitation, domestic servitude and other jobs.

Children are trafficked for forced labour, domestic work, to serve as child soldiers, as well as camel jockeys. The saddest part is that most children are sold for sexual exploitation.

The Eastern Cape has many reported cases of young girls being abducted for the purpose of forced marriage by their own relatives.

The abductors reportedly use *ukuthwala*, a traditional way of forcing young girls under the age of 16 into marriage without their consent.

In Mpumalanga, young boys have been trafficked from Mozambique and Zimbabwe to become slave labour in illegal mines — some even losing their lives working there.

The premier of the Free State, Ace Magashule, recently revealed that human trafficking was a major problem in his province.

The premier vowed that his government, working with law-enforcement agencies, would work hard to root out the scourge in the province.

The police have already identified a ring that runs brothels from old hotel buildings in Bloemfontein. Some of the young women working in these

brothels were lured from Pretoria with the promise of jobs.

In an effort to combat this scourge, the SAPS Organised Crime Unit has created a human trafficking desk, and the Salvation Army has established a task team, based in Johannesburg, to assist victims of trafficking to report their cases.

It is barely three months before the start of the World Cup, so South Africans need to work together to break the backs of these syndicates. If these criminal organisations continue to exist, they could destroy the future of the country's children.

It is proper and fitting to warn soccer lovers and the public not to be lured by traffickers who will stop at nothing to promise unsuspecting victims cash, a good life and jobs.

We reiterate our appeal to the

community to take full parental responsibility to stop the escalating rate of abuse and crime against children.

All children have the right to be safe. They have the right to be protected from being coerced into taking part in forced labour and in unlawful sexual activities.

Communities are urged to report any incident of suspected abduction and kidnapping of children in both urban and rural areas.

We — the police and South Africa's citizens — have a collective responsibility to look after our children and to save them from all forms of abuse or crime committed against them.

● *Sergeant Vincent Mukhathi works at the SAPS Communications head office in Pretoria*

Help stop child trafficking

Report perpetrators to the authorities at:

- SAPS CRIME STOP: 08600 10111
- SAPS EMERGENCY NUMBER: 10111
- CHILDLINE: 0800 0555 55 or
- THE ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING UNIT: 0800 555 999

