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[More Businesses, Consumers Work to Stem Human Trafficking](#)

Human trafficking -- whether for forced labor or sexual exploitation -- doesn't appear to have a lot in common with financial investments. But Julie Tanner of [Christian Brothers Investment Services](#) (CBIS) is trying to connect the dots. As assistant director of socially responsible investing, she urges corporate boards and senior management at firms like [Newmont Mining](#) (gold producers), [The Gap](#), [Levi's](#) and [Best Buy](#) to refuse to employ slave labor or condone sexual exploitation of children throughout their supply chain.

And they're listening.

With \$3.6 billion in assets under management for 1,000 Catholic institutions worldwide, CBIS is considered a small player on an enormous worldwide financial field. Their real buying power to affect change comes through partnerships with 275 faith-based members of the Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) Coalition with combined assets of \$110 billion.

Slave labor

According to the U.S. State Department, there are over 12 million adults and child slaves worldwide. Trafficking, whether for forced labor, bonded labor or sex, is the fastest growing criminal industry in the world and is tied for second place with arms dealing. Drug dealing remains No. 1.

"Many companies are addressing environmental issues, but the social side is just gearing up," Tanner says. "Companies are not powerless bystanders. Businesses play a crucial role in ensuring slave labor doesn't infect the products we buy." But with many of American's favorite shopping clothing holes targeted for employing slave labor -- including WalMart, Old Navy, Banana Republic, Abercrombie & Fitch, Nike and more -- it's an uphill battle.

Chocolate producers are among the most egregious. Prior to Valentine's Day, consumers unwittingly purchased chocolates produced by Hershey's and M&M Mars identified by [Change.org](#) as corporations that employ thousands of child slaves who live under [horrific conditions](#). Most companies who get their cocoa from Ivory Coast farms -- including Nestle's Godiva, Cadbury, Ben & Jerry's -- are equally at fault.

Fortunately, major companies in a variety of industries are stepping up to the plate. Thanks to pressure from the SRI coalition and an internet petition circulated by [Change.org](#) agreed to purge slave labor practices in their supply chain. Their efforts were so successful that the company was presented with the Iqbal Masih award for "efforts to eliminate the worst forms of slave labor."

[Nucor](#), the second largest steel manufacturer of U.S. pig iron, is also committed to eliminating slave labor. Since pig iron is used by all major car makers including Toyota, Ford and General Motors, Tanner is hopeful that the company's efforts could spread to other iron users and manufacturers.

What's a consumer to do?

The more consumers let it be known through their investment and retail buying power that they don't condone using slave labor, the more impact they will have on the large companies to change their policies. For a start, before buying those chocolate Easter Bunnies, they can look for Fair Trade chocolates (prominently marked on the labels) sold at Dunkin Donuts, Whole Foods, Starbucks, Safeway (includes Tom Thumb), Target and Trader Joe's.

Sexual trafficking and the travel industry

Though emphasis has been on applying pressure to corporations and industries employing slave labor in their supply chain, SRI coalition members have also targeted the hotel industry -- particularly in countries and cities hosting major sporting events like the 2010 World Cup and the Super Bowl.

Sex trafficking is not specific to major sporting events -- or third world countries. According to [ECPAT-USA](#) (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking), it is generally accepted that more than 1 million children worldwide enter the sex industry every year. Here in the U.S., approximately 100,000 American girls 11 to 17 years old living in all 50 states are involved against their will, and up to 300,000 are at risk for sexual exploitation, according to a [University of Pennsylvania study](#). Many are of these crimes against children happen in hotels.

The travel industry is in a unique position to stem the tide. Worldwide, 900 travel and tourism companies have signed the ECPAT Treaty since 1991, including major internationally-based chains like ACCOR and NH Hotels. But [Carlson Hotels](#), long a leader in condemning sexual exploitation of children in its Radisson Hotels and Country Inn and Suites, is the only major American-based hotel chain to have signed on.

Those who sign the treaty do more than just adopt a corporate policy against sexual exploitation. They train staff to be observant and to whom to report suspected incidents, build alliances with police and anti-trafficking organizations and welfare agencies, provide information to guests regarding national laws, and reinforce that exploitation is not tolerated in their hotels. Some chains hang informational tags on door knobs, provide reading material in each room and issue room keys with hotline phone numbers imprinted on them.

What's an ordinary traveler to do?

- Learn to identify signs:

- Victims rarely have the ability to speak apart from the adult.
- Their answers appear scripted and rehearsed.
- They may show signs of physical abuse or appear submissive or fearful.
- Many appear under the age of 18 and seem to be involved in prostitution.
- Do not become personally involved. Traffickers are extremely dangerous. Instead, report suspected crimes by calling the national Hotline (888-373-7888) or the contact number provided by the hotel in a foreign country.
- Discuss human trafficking with friends and co-workers to raise awareness.
- Before you reserve space, ask hotels and airlines what they are doing to combat human trafficking.
- Support nonprofits like [The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#), [Polaris Project](#), [Traffick911](#), [KlaasKids](#), ECPAT-USA and [Shared Hope International](#).

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