“Aung and his new bride Mya travel from Myanmar to Thailand in search of a better life. With no money, they accept a free ride to Bangkok. Four hours into the journey, the van suddenly stops and Mya is pulled out and taken away to a brothel. Her family never see her again. Aung is beaten unconscious and wakes up on a fishing boat. He is forced to work 19 hours a day without pay. One night, after four years, he jumps into the ocean and swims four kilometres to a small island. Aung is lucky. Only a few survive such a dangerous escape.”

Mya and Aung’s story plays out in the thousands, every day in Asia. Their horrific experience prompted a group of individuals in Hong Kong to form The Mekong Club, a non-profit private sector organisation dedicated to the abolition of human slavery.
The Face of Slavery

Every day, men, women and children are enslaved. A man is forced to work 19 hour shifts on a fishing boat; a young domestic worker is locked in a private home and regularly beaten; a woman is forced to have sex with up to ten strangers a night; a child is sold into slavery to beg or worse.

Today, it is estimated that there are more than 27 million enslaved persons globally, generating profits of around US$32 billion every year. Slavery is thriving within the countries we work and live. In Asia alone, there is an estimated nine million slaves, working in industries such as textiles, coffee, chocolate, fishing, electronics and pharmaceuticals.
Who We Are

The Mekong Club is a movement within the business community, fighting the business of slavery in Asia. We work with strategic partners, with a particular focus on the Mekong countries.

Based in Hong Kong, our Board is comprised of a diverse range of highly-skilled individuals from the business community, who work alongside experienced human trafficking experts.

Our partners include the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), Edelman Public Relations, MTV Exit, branding agency Sedgwick Richardson, as well as top legal and accounting professionals.

The Mekong Club offers opportunities for businesses and individuals to make a difference in helping to address the growing global problem of slavery.
A Fresh Approach

The Mekong Club’s strategy is to mobilise private sector expertise and resources to fight slavery through business-driven projects that directly disrupt the heart of the slavery trade – the profits.

Our approach is two-fold:

1. To target industries where slavery is most prevalent and to develop viable, sustainable solutions that are appropriate to these industries

2. To identify the expertise and partnerships available from within the business community to help implement effective solutions
We are results-oriented with set objectives that are measured regularly.

In 2012, we aim to execute four projects—all of which are cost-effective and scalable solutions with real impact.

One of our key guiding principles is to ensure that at least 90 per cent of all funds raised will be used to fight slavery. We are here to make a tangible, measurable difference; not to saddle our donors with administrative costs (our running costs are met almost entirely by our Board members).

Ensure 90%+ of all funds raised will be used to fight slavery.
2012 Projects and Funding Needs
Education on Slavery in the Supply Chain
Project 1: Education on Slavery in the Supply Chain

The Problem

We perceive a critical information gap in the market place:

- Governments and NGO’s in the Mekong region have developed comprehensive data on the incidence of slavery – by country and by sector. This data is vital information for assisting the fight against slavery.

- The private sector, while passionately committed to abolishing slavery, does not currently have access to this data.

Our Solutions

The Mekong Club has the unique access and requisite skills to marshal the data on slavery available within the Mekong region, and present this to the private sector via targeted seminars that are meaningful and actionable.

The need for good governance and risk management ensures that corporations will be receptive to this approach. The recent California Transparency in Supply Chains Act provides a further imperative by creating legal incentives for the largest corporations in the U.S. (and foreign companies that are active in California) to tackle the issue of slavery.

Expected Outcomes

By participating in a training seminar, we will ask companies to become paid corporate members of the Mekong Club and in return, they will also receive quarterly bulletins that will enhance their ability to reduce and eliminate slavery in their supply chains.

Through memberships, “Project 1” will quickly be self-funded. However, funds are needed to enable the Mekong Club to develop training modules and bulletins.

The funding needs for Project 1 during 2012

US$50,000
A Voluntary “Slavery Free” Mark
Project 2: A Voluntary “Slavery Free” Mark

The Problem
Throughout the world, there are selected products made within workshops and factories that use slave labour. This usually occurs at the lower end of supply chains, where there is little monitoring of the labour conditions. Increasingly, consumers are demanding to know which products are made in a responsible way and which products are made with exploited labour. However, often companies further up the supply chain cannot guarantee their products are slave-free, or if they can, may not be able to have this independently verified.

Our Solutions
The Mekong Club understands that no responsible business wants their products and services to be tainted with anything related to slavery.

Our approach is to work alongside businesses to create a process that provides them with a positive incentive to look at their own products, to ensure that they are ‘exploitation’ free.

Our hallmark project is to develop and commercialise a visually impactful “slavery free” mark for application to a range of products manufactured within the Mekong countries, and beyond. We will partner with supply chain experts to develop and commercialise independent supply chain audits. Once companies can demonstrate that their supply chains are clean, they will be offered the opportunity to use the mark.

We plan to have our “slavery free” mark developed and in place by the end of 2012. This project will be developed in consultation with businesses, to ensure that their inputs and views are taken into consideration as the compliance process is developed, tested and finalized.

Expected Outcomes
We regard this as a game-changing initiative that will, at a stroke, reduce the incidence of slavery in the Mekong region and affect thousands, if not tens of thousands of lives over the coming years.

The Mekong Club sees the seafood packaging industry as the most pressing project for the application of a slavery free mark at this time.

The funding needs for Project 2 during 2012
US$ 150,000
Slaves in the Sex Industry
Throughout Asia, slavery within the sex industry is widespread. Many women and girls are trafficked (tricked and deceived) into situations where they lose control over their lives.

Most cases do not move forward within the legal system, being overly reliant on testimony from reluctant victims and hampered by poor investigation techniques and the multi-country nature of many of these crimes.

Without successful investigation and prosecution, criminal groups continue to flourish, and women and girls who escape or are rescued from sex slavery are simply replaced by others.

The Mekong Club is working with legal specialist units that focus on proactive, covert surveillance of slavery conditions within sex trafficking rings to document criminal behaviour in a manner that will significantly increase legal convictions – notwithstanding weak court systems and the potential for corruption.

Drawing on the latest investigative techniques, our partners have identified what we believe to be some of the worst criminal sex trafficking rings in the Mekong region – groups that for years have blatantly operated as if they are above and beyond the law. The worst of these rings are being targeted for surveillance and prosecution.

- The rescue of sex trafficking victims and their referral to voluntary, safe and secure, recovery programmes that will help them to move on with their lives.
- Successful arrests and prosecution of notorious trafficking criminals in the Mekong region, with a focus on disabling entire trafficking networks rather than just individual players.

The funding needs for Project 3 during 2012

US$ 75,000
Telecommunications Initiatives

We have identified two specific areas within the telecommunications field where private sector expertise will greatly enhance efforts to disrupt the trafficking of slaves.
Project 4A: Smartphone victim identification

Law enforcement officials throughout Asia often come into contact with potential slavery victims. However, because they don’t know which country the person comes from, and because they cannot communicate with them, the victim goes unidentified. This is particularly problematic in labour trafficking situations, including fishing boat cases and migrants working within the seafood industry.

As a result, many slaves lose what is likely to be their only opportunity to be rescued, and the enslavers continue unhampered.

The Mekong Club is creating a smartphone application that allows law enforcement officials in the Asia region to question potential victims without speaking their language, with the use of simple pre-recorded videos and questionnaires.

When properly used by law enforcement officials, this smartphone application will significantly help to rescue victims in the field every day.

The application will also lead to the identification of criminal trafficking networks, allowing action to be taken against them by law enforcement.

The funding needs for Project 4A during 2012

US$ 25,000
The Problem

For many years, victim hotlines have been used as a means of offering information and support to vulnerable migrants to prevent a trafficking outcome and/or to help those who may have already fallen victim. While the basic rationale behind this is sound, in practice, hotlines often do not live up to their potential for the following reasons:

a. for those migrants/trafficked persons who are far from home, it is often not possible to pay the cost of an international call;

b. remembering the phone number can be difficult, especially if it is a standard seven or eight digit number;

c. if they do get through to a hotline, the operator may not speak their language.

Our Solutions

To address these issues, the Mekong Club will work with an international telecommunications company to put in place a free hotline that provides one easy-to-remember number that could be accessed and promoted throughout the whole region (e.g. 555). The number would place a local call from any country in the region and will link to a hotline operator who speaks the caller’s language.

This initiative will help to link counter-trafficking responders together (police, shelter workers, etc.), using a common platform.

Expected Outcomes

This programme will correct longstanding issues related to hotline programmes that have failed in the human trafficking sector for many years. By using internet technology and linking the information with NGO and government agencies, a new, comprehensive response network can be put in place to better serve the needs of migrants and those who have been trafficked.

Information provided by victims will also be used to target trafficking networks and put them out of business.

Project 4B: Regional Hotline

The Mekong Club is working to create a regional hotline so that victims of slavery can call an easy to remember free-phone number from any country in Southeast Asia and speak in their own language or dialect, to report their slavery situation.

The funding needs for Project 4B during 2012

US$ 50,000
“It’s right to fight against human slavery. This is why the private sector has so willingly joined our cause. I hope you will join us as well”.

DAVID HALL-JONES

Mekong Club Chairman,
Winston & Strawn LLP

Our Need

The Mekong Club seeks to have funding in place for each of the above projects no later than 1st October 2012. We are also seeking the expertise and funding of Asia’s private sector in order to generate the maximum impact from each of these projects. Working together, we can make a difference to free the lives of many people.

JOIN OUR FIGHT.

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