

[www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=705586&contrassID=2&subContrassID=4](http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=705586&contrassID=2&subContrassID=4)

**Terms of forced employment and slavery**

Haaretz, April 14, 2006

By Haaretz Editorial

The phenomenon of employing foreign workers under slave conditions, without pay or minimal pay, locked in the employer's home far from the eyes of the law and public is a shocking one, which has not passed by Israel. The desperate search for livelihood is horribly exploited by employers in the Western world, and in Israel. The Immigration Police prefer to chase down foreign workers and expel them and is not interested the terms of their employment. It is possible that the very existence of the constant hunt for foreign workers deters those workers from filing complaints against their employers. In those few cases where complaints are filed, the cases are closed for lack of public interest. Nowadays, some 100,000 illegal foreign workers are estimated to be in Israel and some are hidden in their employer's homes for years. Behind lock and key, it is easier to exploit workers.

The celebration of Pesach reminds us that once we were slaves. Now we are taskmasters, according to the stories being uncovered by Haaretz reporter Ruth Sinai about workers whose employers abused them in horrible ways. In one case, a foreign worker is still living in a hostel for women in emergency situations and waits for her employer to pay her wages that he garnished for years. In another case, a legal worker, whose handicapped employer brought her from the Ukraine to Israel and then refused to pay her, humiliated her and was violent to her. In a third case, there is a family that demanded its caretaker have sex every day with the elderly man for whom she was hired to care. In all these cases, the employers were not punished because the affairs were only made known to the authorities through relief organizations like Kav La'oved.

Meretz MK Zahava Gal-On's bill, which has passed a first reading, sets a 16-year sentence on those convicted of trading in people, and those who employ them under conditions of slavery and forced labor. The bill, which has been joined by a similar government bill, deals with immigrant workers, with the sale of body parts and buying and selling babies. Rachel Gershoni, in charge of the issue at the Justice Ministry, proposes that the principle of continuity be applied to the bill so that it goes through its second and third reading in the next Knesset. Israel now faces the threat of international sanctions if it does not start taking these cases seriously. In 2005, Israel was ranked very high on the scale of those countries that are not doing enough to eradicate the phenomenon of employment under slavery conditions - meaning diligent enforcement of the law and severe sentences for the convicted.

While the trade in human beings for the purpose of prostitution is banned by the law - and is condemned by most of the public - trading in people for enslavement in households gets much less attention. According to a study by the California Civil Liberties Union household enslavement is ranked second after the trade in human beings for the purpose of prostitution. Chasing after illegal immigrants to expel them only worsens the situation and does not solve it. A more humane economic policy should be formulated, and inspectors from the Labor Ministry should be used instead of the Immigration Police, in a way that protects foreign workers instead of hunting them down and turning them into easy prey for their employers.

[www.signonsandiego.com/news/world/20060312-0854-israel-workerskids.html](http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/world/20060312-0854-israel-workerskids.html)

**Children of illegal aliens find place, but some Israelis fret about national identity**

SignonSanDiego.com, March 12, 2006

By Sara Toth

TEL AVIV, Israel – Dennis Sarpong used to live in fear that his mother, a Ghanaian on an expired work visa, would be deported. He would walk her to her cleaning jobs every morning because Israeli law bars police from arresting parents in their children's presence.

Now 16-year-old Sarpong is among 150 Israeli-born children of foreign workers who recently were granted Israeli residency. His new status also shields his mother from deportation and he can sleep an extra hour before heading to school. But some Israelis are uneasy that what the government insists is a one-time gesture will become a threat to the identity of the Jewish state.

The issue reveals conflicting impulses that go to the core of Israel's self-image.

A state founded as a haven for Jews worries that its Jewish character is being diluted by a growing Arab minority, lately augmented by up to 300,000 migrants from Africa and Asia. Schooled in the virtues of Jewish self-reliance, it has seen the foreigners become dominant in whole sectors of its economy, chiefly construction and care for the elderly.

But the spectacle of helpless children being threatened with deportation has also touched a nerve, and Israeli human rights groups are waging a court battle to let at least some of them stay in the land where they go to school and whose Hebrew language they speak like sabras – native-born Israelis.

Foreign workers have been coming to Israel since the 1980s, but their number has increased in the last decade to replace a Palestinian work force shut out by Israeli-Palestinian fighting.

Estimates range between 100,000 and 300,000, and in a nation of nearly 7 million, granting their children citizenship would not change Israel in any fundamental way, says Roby Nathanson, chairman of the Israeli Institute for Economic and Social Research. Israel is already 25 percent non-Jewish, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics.

But Eli Yishai, the former interior minister who heads Shas, an orthodox Jewish political party, says granting residency to children such as Sarpong has done “very serious damage to the Israeli identity.”

The government should not grant residency to non-Jews, even if they are born here, he said. “Otherwise, we will stop being Israel, and become a country like other countries.”

But although the children aren't Jewish, they act just like their Jewish classmates and have never set foot in their parents' homeland.

“I am Israeli,” said 9-year-old Danica Hormillada, daughter of Filipino housecleaners. “And also a little bit Filipinit,” she added, using the Hebrew word for a Filipina.

The Hormillada children – Danica, 18-year-old Niño and 19-year-old Starsky – speak Hebrew among themselves, but did not meet the strict qualifications so therefore did not win residency and could be deported. For Sarpong, however, “everything got easier” after he received his ID card. Now he can register for a basketball team, and maybe even apply to bring back his father who was deported to Ghana in 2000.

Sergio DellaPergola, a demographer at Hebrew University, said children of foreign workers in Israel are too few to significantly alter the ethnic makeup of society. But if migrant workers continue to move here, “in theory, in the future, it could become a much bigger issue,” he said.

## Background Articles

# Migrant Workers

הקרן החדשה לישראל  
New Israel Fund  
الصندوق الجديد لإسرائيل

The 150 children given legal status in December had to be Israeli-born, age 10 or older, with parents who arrived in Israel legally. Their siblings and parents were granted temporary residency, renewable annually.

The Hotline for Migrant Workers and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel have asked the Supreme Court to extend permanent residency to children older than 10 even if they were born abroad and their parents arrived illegally.

This would make about 350 more children eligible, said Hotline spokesman Romm Lewkowicz.

The court has ruled that those children and their families can stay here until the end of this month, when it is to issue a final decision.

“We don't see any difference between someone who came here at the age of 2 and is now 15, and someone who was born here and is now 15,” said Yoav Loeff of the civil rights association.

“The aim is to save these children from cultural expulsion. The children are not responsible for the way their parents came here and the country that let them stay so long.”

[www.forward.com/articles/human-trafficking-report-slaps-israel/](http://www.forward.com/articles/human-trafficking-report-slaps-israel/)

### Human Trafficking Report Slaps Israel

*The Forward*, June 9, 2006

By Ori Nir

WASHINGTON — The State Department has put Israel on a special “watch list,” citing its “failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to address trafficking” in human beings.

In its annual Report on Human Trafficking, published Monday, the State Department contended that “the Government of Israel does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking” and has failed to show efforts to address “conditions of involuntary servitude allegedly facing thousands of foreign migrant workers.” Specifically, the report chides Israel’s government for not pushing to pass legislation criminalizing all forms of trafficking. It states that Israel “should also more vigorously enforce existing bans against charging recruitment fees and withholding passports, factors that contribute to the trafficking of workers.”

This is the first time in four years that the administration has downgraded Israel’s ranking, putting it in the unflattering company of Third World, mostly non-democratic regimes. The report classifies 149 countries into four groups. Most countries are in Tier 1, which means that they are effectively fighting human trafficking and reducing it to a minimum. A small minority, 12 countries that include Iran, Cuba, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Sudan, are in the lowest, Tier 3. These are governments that have not made “significant efforts” to bring themselves “into compliance with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons.” Such countries may face the withholding of American foreign aid. In between, there is the Tier 2 category and the even more negative Tier 2 Watch List for countries that are seen as not doing enough to improve.

Trafficking is one of several areas in which Israel has come under U.S. scrutiny. Others include religious freedom, human rights generally and money laundering.

In 2001, when the first trafficking report was published, many were shocked to see Israel ranked in Tier 3. The main reason for this low ranking was the pervasive illegal importation of young women, mainly from Eastern European countries, for prostitution in Israel. Efforts by the Israeli government to confront the phenomenon convinced the State Department to upgrade Israel to Tier 2, where it has remained since 2002. This year, however, Israel found itself downgraded to the Tier 2 Watch List — one step away from being ranked again with the world’s most notorious regimes on the issue.

In reaction to the report, Israel’s Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying that Israel “is fighting with various tools” against the phenomenon of violating the rights of foreign workers. The statement also points out that the report is based only on data pertaining to the period of April 2004 to April 2005. In the past year, the Israeli statement says, there were “additional actions taken, which contributed significantly to advancing the battle against trafficking in people.”

One explanation for Israel’s drop this year is that the report focused not on sex-related trafficking but on migrant workers. And although the report noted the progress that Israel made in fighting the trafficking of women, it pointed out that the government “did not demonstrate significant efforts to improve its protection of labor trafficking victims.” These victims, the report says, “do not receive adequate protection services. The government does not operate a shelter for their rehabilitation, housing them in detention facilities instead. Such victims are also frequently arrested and deported for violation of immigration regulations before they have an opportunity to testify against their employers. The government does not provide state funded legal aid to foreign workers, and often fails to include interpreters in judicial and deportation hearings.”

## Background Articles

# Migrant Workers

הקרן החדשה לישראל  
New Israel Fund  
الصندوق الجديد لإسرائيل

John Miller, who directs the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, told reporters Monday that being on the Watch List is a "warning," and that some countries on that list are in danger of slipping to the lowest category.

An ironic twist is that Rahel Gershuni, de facto anti-trafficking coordinator of the Israeli government, is mentioned in the State Department report as one of 10 "heroes acting to end modern day slavery" worldwide. Gershuni was noted for having "tirelessly led the Israeli effort to fight sex trafficking."

The downgrading of Israel "is a sobering development that unfortunately reflects what we see every day on the ground," said Shevi Korzen, director of the Hotline for Migrant Workers, an Israeli legal-aid organization. Korzen said that the main problem facing migrant workers is their inability to leave an employer who often maltreats them. Migrant workers, she explained, are typically recruited overseas by local human resources contractors, who charge them large sums of money — often up to \$15,000 — to ensure a work license in Israel. Some of that money is paid to Israeli dealers.

Often, Korzen said, these workers have to mortgage their homes to pay the large sum. In Israel, they find themselves bound to their employers. They can't travel back, because of the debt they left at home, but they are also not allowed to stay in Israel unless they are working for the Israeli employer who hired them to come to Israel.

In March, Israel's Supreme Court ruled that this policy, in practice for 13 years, was illegal. The court ordered the government to adopt a new one within six months. That process has not yet been completed.