

2014 SUMMIT



TOGETHER LET'S STOP TRAFFICK

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Leif
Coorlim

Journalist and
Editorial Director,
CNN Freedom Project

PRESENTATION TRANSCRIPT

Leif Coorlim
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Hi guys. Good morning. You know, it was actually, it was funny that Time in Ottawa actually brought Christmas to the CBC, the newsroom there when we brought Mr. Blair into their office as, you know, as the biggest story in Canada at the time. And, we just ended up showing up with the, you know, the key person to talk to on the story. So, they actually, like, we were just trying to get an interview with our anchor back in Atlanta. But, it ended up being a mob scene inside the newsroom. You can see like the, you can see like the paparazzi, you know, they, what we call a scrum, in the news. They actually had it in their own newsroom, which, I think, was a first. So anyway, in the side.

But, I'm very happy to be here in West Virginia with you guys and thrilled to kick off the summit this year. As you heard, I run the CNN Freedom Project which is a very interesting initiative. It's actually the first time CNN has ever taken a public position on an issue, which is human trafficking. I'm praying that we didn't go too far out on the limb tonight. Slavery is wrong. Since we launched in 2011, we've done more than, I think, 450 stories at this point looking at all kinds of different trafficking all over the world. So, whether it's bonded labor in India or sex trafficking in Eastern Europe, or, you know, those kind of insane cases of organ trafficking in the Sinai, or people who have been branded like cattle, literally branded on their face, faces in Eritrea.

We've gone to like a lot of, I think, a lot of great lengths to go to these places where nobody goes, where there is no infrastructure and there's certainly no rule of law just to try to bring these stories out so that the world can see it. And, I actually have a video to give you some kind of context or breadth, you know, a scope of what we're doing with the Freedom Project. And, we can roll that real quickly. So, that's a smattering of the kind of stories that we've done. I think, some of those you saw were what Kim was alluding to in his talk a few minutes ago. And, what I think is

interesting and, maybe, the best thing CNN has done as a result of this project is the fact that, up until we started doing these kind of serial stories, serial projects where we stay on a topic for weeks at a time and really bring it light, up until that point, it'd really been, I think, a case of, you know, second hand storytelling.

So, you could hear the stories, you, kind of, I guess, abstractly knew that it was going on, but, you didn't really, you couldn't see the kids that were being, you know, subjected to slave like conditions in West Africa. Or, you couldn't see the fisherman from Thailand who had spent years at sea and hear their stories first hand. So, that's what I think, you know, maybe, our great contribution has been. As a result, in the four years we've been doing this, as I mentioned, we told about 450 stories, we've helped change laws in several countries and the State of California. Our stories have helped change corporate policies, like you saw with the Wyndham Hotels, that chain there. And, we've help raise over \$24 million for anti-trafficking organizations around the world, people who have seen our stories and then contributed.

[Applause]

I wanted to talk to you today about a story that I'm working on right now with the actress Jada Pinkett Smith. It's an eight part series that we're just getting started. It's called Broots. And, it's the new American slavery. It's kind of a play on the great TV miniseries, Roots, that documented America's history with slavery. This is looking at, you know, human trafficking as it exists today and also the root causes of what's really, the underlying motivating factors of what is happening in the United States today whether it's a breakdown in the foster care system or the objectification of women. There are several things happening right now in our society that is really alarming. And, it's leading to hundreds of thousands of American children being victimized every day.

And, one of the things that I think is really interesting is, the stories that we told, in America, are every bit as graphic and vile and disturbing and disgusting as the stories I've told in Cambodia or Gambia or Northern India. There was a story, an interview we did with a man named Mustapha Solomon who, it's absolutely heinous

what he did. And, he's actually in federal prison right down the road, about two hours from here. And, he, basically, what he did was, he would put ads up on back page in Craigslist, not in the adult section but in the general classified ad, you know, general classified areas where he would say things like, you know, if you need a place to stay, I'm looking for somebody to help out around the house. Or, you know, if you want flexible hours and a big pay day, you know, answer this ad.

And so, of course, girls would come like clockwork, you know, from various different situations. They may have been, you know, rebelling from their parents at home or they might have been a single mother looking for an, you know, a way to make, you know, fast money, maybe. But, he would have them meet him at a shopping mall in various parts of Atlanta, my hometown, just down the road from where I live. And, he would have them approach the car, you know, they'd walk up to the car. Two people would jump out and grab the girl and throw her in the trunk. And then, they would take off either to Florida or Alabama. And, when he got the victims, usually to hotel rooms, what he would do, they were, first of all, they were bound and duct taped for the whole drive in the trunk.

When they arrived, he would take them, throw them in the closet, bring them out one by one, after, you know, maybe, half an hour 45 minutes, bring them out one by one, rape them and then beat them bloody. From there, he immediately put them to work in prostitution. They would service maybe 5 or 6 men that same night. He had a woman working with him, what they call a bottom bitch. She was there to make sure that, while he was out that there was, you know, discipline being maintained. And, they did all kinds of things, I mean, absolutely, tortured these women and Indian girls that were 15 and 18.

And, it was, it was really disturbing to me to think that, I don't know, I think, over the four years we've been doing the Freedom Project, I guess, there, I don't want to call it smugness, but, there seemed to be this, this notion that, yeah, we have a problem with human trafficking in the United States but it's not really like what you

see in Cambodia or Thailand or South Africa. It is, you know, it's kind of a kinder gentler version. But, I think, this is, you know, what we're talking about here in the United States is every bit as big and as bad as what we've seen abroad. So, one of the things we want to do, with the Freedom Project in 2015, and this is a little sneak peek and, hopefully, you guys will help us in this effort. But, we want to bring together, in the spirit of collaboration, all of the different, all of the different players and the different sectors in this issue.

So, we're going to be looking at four, kind of, cornerstones of society and looking at ways that we can engage people and really elevate the key players who are doing their best to actually try to stop trafficking. In the areas of law, which is, of course, law enforcement and government, education. There's some interesting things happening with an organization called A-21. They're trying to put a curriculum in place at the U.S. Department of Education, the state school boards across the country. I think, there's a pilot program in Florida where they, they want to teach young children, 7th and 8th graders about trafficking and what some of the signs are.

Also, we want to look at culture, obviously, you know, we always get good ratings when we bring a celebrity on board. But, I think, you know, engaging, engaging the people that the society, especially the young people of a society, listen to. It's very important. We did this story two years ago with Manny Pacquiao in the Philippines. And, basically, the story wasn't necessarily about, of course it was about human trafficking. We did the interviews with the victims. But, it was really, kind of more of a universal story where this woman, who had been fighting against trafficking for 20 years, you know, banging their heads up against the wall to get people to pay attention, to get law enforcement to enact the raids when she knew that there were these flop houses in various parts of Manilla. She couldn't get any traction.

So, she had this dream that, if she got Manny Pacquiao, you know, the most famous boxer, probably the most famous Filipino of all time, to, actually, you know, take this

up as one of his causes, that, that might make a difference. And so, we, kind of chronicled that story. And, as a result, it became, it was a very nice documentary. But, as a result, the Federal Government, actually funded a grass roots student lead organization called I Fight Against Trafficking which was a play on the fighters, the film and they used our logo and everything. But, they now have 450,000 students who've signed up across the Philippines and Australia.

So, I think that it's very important that we look at the power of, obviously, you know, law enforcement and established organizations, but also, celebrities, members of, you know, key people who have, who have large followings on social media, the different aspects of society that can really come together and make a difference. So, you know, I could, I could, probably, stand up here and talk for, you know, another two hours. And, if anybody has any questions, you know, please, please jump in. But, I think, it's really, as we go forward this week, I think, it's really critical that we keep in mind that, while you may not ever get the accolades or receive any awards for this kind of work, I can't think of anything that's more important or, maybe, more self-fulfilling than to spend, you know, every ounce of energy that you have trying to get these stories out, trying to put the protocols in place to actually, you know, make it easy for different organizations to get involved, pressure law makers, you know, to actually pass the laws that can protect victims.

I think, you know, so many people will forget about the, this, I guess, maybe, the singular human right, which is freedom of choice. And, if we can provide that for people, I think, that that's something, you know, that, when we're all long gone, that, even if we never meet these people, I think that that's something that, you know, you can take with your grave and feel very good about what you've done with your time here on this earth. So, thank you.

[Applause]

And if anybody has any questions, I'll just stand up here and try my best to answer them. Yeah.

[Inaudible]

Thanks.

Is there any challenges for you all, that, starting this project up, slavery wasn't really talked about really four years ago.

Right.

So what was the journey for you all getting this off the ground?

Well yeah, it wasn't, it definitely wasn't easy, especially getting, you know, all the stakeholders at CNN to make a departure from our, I guess, editorial philosophy which is that we don't take a position on any issue, even though everybody, you know, silently or not so silently knows that slavery is wrong and is outraged by it, I think that there was still hesitation to go down that road. But, what happened was, I'm a documentary filmmaker by, you know, by nature. And, I'd done this story in Cambodia where we had tried to rescue a 12 year old girl out of a brothel. And, we documented it with hidden camera footage and given that over to the Cambodia police. And, the day that we were supposed to go on the raid, the police told us that, you know, they'd gone by the night before to the brothel, the girl was 19 and all her papers were in order. And, we knew, instantly, that there was some corruption going on.

So, we, actually, had to leave the country, you know, within, we bought the next plane out, plane ticket out. And, when I went back to CNN and showed them that footage of this 12 year old girl offering sex to three, actually three of us in the room. I was in my 30s, a man in his 40s and another man in his 50s and this 12 year old girl looking so afraid but still, you know, I mean, it was just, it was one of the most, I would say, traumatic moments in my life just being in that room. And then, you know, when I brought it back to the executives at CNN, they were aghast. And, they were thinking, well, how is it that we're looking at a situation where there's 20

million or 30 million, you know, depending on the statistics that you want to use, how is it that there are that many slaves and nobody's talking about this, or, if they are talking about it, it's only episodically? So, you have, you know, a story of a West African who is was brought over to the United States to braid hair and wasn't paid for her work at the salon, or, you know, somebody in Russia who was forced into sex trafficking in the mob and nobody had actually put it together that this was a broader problem on an international scope.

So, I think, the challenges that we really faced in getting it off the ground was, just, kind of, figuring out how far we wanted to go as a news organization. And what really, actually, that I think is very interesting that developed out of all of that is that we now have a different genre of journalism as a result of it. It's something that we all impact journalism. So, we maintain all of the same editorial principles when we tell these stories. Everything goes through the same process as any other story, if we were doing something on Ebola or the Ukraine, you know, it's the same correspondence doing those stories as the reports for the Freedom Project.

So, it's not, necessarily, advocacy journalism, even though we're pushing for the end of slavery and we're trying to highlight the good work of people on the ground doing it. But, we don't cross over into this, we will support these organizations no matter what. If they do something wrong, they get treated just like, you know, any other organization and any other issue. But, what we're, what we're saying is we, as a network, are committed to helping in the fight against slavery in which ever way that that might take. But, we won't cross over into the realm of advocacy.

And, what that, I think, has done has allowed people to take what we're saying a lot more seriously because it's not oh well CNN has this pet cause and they're, you know, just doing it. It's really that CNN wants to let the world know that this is as big a problem as to necessitate a strong editorial break that we will, will put ourselves out there to tell this story and face, maybe, some criticism that we have gone a little too far. And, I think, that that has really allowed a lot of other actors, in the media, to

pick up on these stories. We've seen a lot of engagement. You know, it was, it was funny because, I mean, that was the reason we started the Freedom Project was because nobody was talking about slavery. And, I was just at a conference a few weeks ago. And, they were like, oh well, how is it? I mean, it must be nice that you're working on the hot issue right now. And, I kind of had this moment where it was like a double take. It was like, well, it's precisely the opposite reason why we did this was because nobody was talking about it. And, I think, through our work, a lot of people have come to learn about it and learn about the different, the different forms of it.