

Human trafficking is all too real, filmmaker discovers

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AUSTIN—A few years ago, Justin Dillon read an article in the *New York Times* Sunday magazine that detailed the story of young Indian girls who were searching for a better life in the United States but ended up in prostitution. Along the way, they were robbed, sold into slavery, beaten and repeatedly raped.

The atrocities were unfathomable to Dillon, a San Francisco musician. Like other horrifying events such as the genocide in Darfur and the Holocaust, he had no mental framework through which he could comprehend what was taking place in something called human trafficking. More than 12 million people were affected by it, a number so large he found it unimaginable.

Until he met one of the people affected by it.

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Justin Dillon, director of the documentary,
Call and Response, speaks at the BGCT
Christian Life Conference in Austin.
(Higher quality version [here](#))

Shortly after reading the article, Dillon and his band played a small town near the Black Sea. The crowds were raucous and energetic, treating Dillon and his bandmates like they were the Beatles. After the show, he met one of his new fans, a teenage girl who believed she had paid someone to make travel arrangements for her to go to the U.S.

But her story didn't add up. She believed she was going to the U.S. for a

more comfortable lifestyle—working in a fast-food restaurant. Remembering the Times article, Dillon dug deeper, asking the girl to show him the paperwork for her travel arrangements.

She had none. Dillon sat her down and explained to her that she was being swindled and most likely would become a victim of human trafficking. He told her that she likely would be sold, beaten and raped, never living the life she thought she was a plane ride from.

The toughest part wasn't explaining what most likely was this girl's fate, Dillon said. It was watching her decide to take the chance anyway.

"They're blinded by their desire for something better," he said during a session of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Christian Life Commission.

Shaken by his first contact with human trafficking, Dillon was determined to do something. He gathered a few of his musician friends and started putting together a concert to fight human trafficking, but couldn't get everyone together for one date.

Eventually the project morphed from a concert to a documentary that would take him across the country and overseas. Last year, *Call and Release*, a musical film about human trafficking, was released in an effort to raise awareness about the issue. He has been touring with the movie ever since, including a showing during the CLC conference.

Human trafficking is a global issue, but is particularly important in Texas, where 20 percent of U.S. human trafficking occurs, according to Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, D-San Antonio. The I-10 corridor has been designated as the most used human trafficking passage in the nation.

About 80 percent of human trafficking victims are female, and roughly 50 percent of victims are children. Traffickers work in organized underground

syndicates, moving women at least every month.

Victims run the gamut of ethnicities and are in a variety of jobs, but many of them end up in sexually oriented businesses, said Rep. Rafael Anchia, D-Dallas. Because of that, he helped craft legislation that helped Dallas law enforcement officers to crack down on exotic dancing clubs and massage parlors, uncovering groups of girls who had been trafficked.

Anchia and Van de Putte are attempting to round out legislation mandating training for law enforcement officers to recognize and stop human trafficking. They're also working on systems to track human trafficking and allow a way to hold human traffickers accountable in civil court.

"Our fight to end human trafficking will be long and arduous," Van de Putte said.

Eric Nichols, Texas deputy attorney general said that fight will require the help of the public and public organizations such as churches. Texans serve as the eyes and ears for law enforcement officials, he said.

"This is an issue where your organization and your churches, if you have the enthusiasm, can make a difference," he said.