



Women in Leadership Seminar Highlights

April 22, 2016

Topic- April 22: “Tackling Abuse and Slavery of Women & Girls: Global Strategies That Work” featuring Michele Rickett, President / CEO of She is Safe (SIS).



Michele Rickett gave an inspiring and educational talk at Women in Leadership on “Tackling Abuse and Slavery of Women & Girls: Global Strategies That Work”. Michele, along with her hard-working team at She is Safe, works in the highest risk areas for slave trade to help women and men be rescued from the dangerous cycle of slavery. Michele shared her personal story, her professional goals, and detailed information on what we all as individuals can do to help those at risk abroad and at home.

Michele began by explaining how this issue came into her life. Michele and her husband moved to Nairobi for her husband’s work. She had studied the area before but had never come across any information that prepared her for the abuse and slavery she

witnessed. It came as a huge shock to her when she saw girls as young as 11 years old enslaved in the homes of people she knew. After seeing this, Michele began to dig into the issues of slavery and sex trade to discover the cause of enslavement and the areas that were highest risk.

What Michele found in her research was that overwhelmingly women were the victims of the slave trade industry. This is because, often, women are taken from areas where they are viewed as unequal. Women are not as educated as men and are viewed as assets in labor and marriage which targets them for use in slavery.

Michele informed the group that there are approximately 38.5 million people enslaved in the world today and slaves exist in every country. Human trafficking is a \$30 billion a year industry and the most heavily affected continent is Asia. According to recent research, 98 percent of all victims in sex trade are female, and the average age of those females has become younger over time.

Once the group was informed of the background and impact of human trafficking, Michele began outlining what is done by She is Safe to make sure girls and women are safe who are at risk for or who have been trafficked. She began by outlining the four goals of She is Safe:

- Prevention: equip girls and families with the information to not get trafficked. Help to educate and explain the signs of a potential trafficking situation. Also, assist with economic development of villages by allowing women to work and contribute to their family’s home.

- Rescue: station local volunteers, mostly women, at the borders in high risk countries to identify potential trafficking perpetrators and victims.
- Restoration: sponsor homes to help with the rehabilitation process of women who have been trafficked.
- Advocacy: raise awareness in the United States and other areas to raise money and build teams for prevention and education.

Michele continued her talk by educating the audience on the four strategies that work to reduce human trafficking:

- **Learn:** continue to read, research, and understand the who/what/why/when/how of trafficking. In our fast-paced, technologically-evolving society, the ways in which people are taken is always changing, so we must continue to learn to identify these shifts.
- **Focus:** focus on vulnerable girls. Women make up 98 percent of the trafficked population. We need to educate people on the importance of women in society and transform the next generation of boys and girls.
- **Mobilize and Equip Women:** it is critical to mobilize and equip women to be change makers. Prevention is the best thing we can do, and women around the world, especially in high risk areas, have been the best preventers.
- **Collaborate:** the most important strategy is to collaborate with local grassroots women. The ripple effect is one of the most powerful methods of creating impact. Work with other individuals and organizations to make this issue a priority everywhere.

Michele ended her talk on the positive note of the most important step to take that everyone can implement immediately – look at the bigger issue. If women around the world are treated in a degrading and devalued manner, we need to change how we talk about women. The most important prevention tool is to educate girls and boys, men and women, to value and respect one another.

Q&A

You spoke a little about trafficking in Atlanta. What can be done to prevent that?

- Well She is Safe works outside of the United States but we work with organizations that are doing work here. Part of the work is to educate men and help them get over the internal hurdle that many men have. Which I get, it's an uncomfortable thing to talk about, but we need to be able to talk about the way women are treated and the exploitation of women. For example, the connection between porn use and women being exploited is a conversation we need to be able to have.

What can individuals here in the room do to help?

- Look up www.Atltrafficking.com – it's an underground watchdog organization. Massage parlors all over the city have a lot of slavery. We've seen a pattern that the United States men who partake in these activities view women of other countries as lesser than them. Other things you can do is if you travel a lot, don't stay in a hotel that hasn't signed [The Code](#). Companies who have signed on with The Code have trained their employees to look for signs of sex trade and slavery. Delta is a large Atlanta organization that has signed the code. We also need to educate as many people as we can about how pornography contributes to the perception of women and the perpetuation of violence against women.

What can we do to get the [Safe Harbor](#) amendment passed?

- Use terms of urgency to get voters involved and specifically looking for this amendment when they go to vote. The amendment will be on the ballot in the Fall. If you go to the [Safe Harbor](#) website and pledge to vote yes, they will automatically keep you informed on the developments regarding the amendment. We need to educate our networks, friends, and family to understand what this amendment means.

What is being done to educate young boys and girls in schools about this message?

- There are a few organizations that get into schools. One of the things we've created is a paper doll book that helps to begin talking about the issue at a young age. Parents in particular can go to PTA meetings to begin conversations about what we can do.