

Actress and Ambassador Mira Sorvino on Fighting Back Against Trafficking

By: Lauren Gandy, Sibille H. Pritchard Global Peace Fellow

“How many of you know a lot about human trafficking?” The question was asked by Academy-award winning actress Mira Sorvino, speaking to an audience of around 300 in the UCF Pegasus Ballroom on March 23. Some hands shot up. Then she asked, “How many of you know some?” More hands joined. “And how many know a little and want to know more?” Almost all hands reached toward the ceiling. This was how Sorvino began her talk on the global fight against human trafficking.



As a former Amnesty International Ambassador for the “Stop Violence Against Women” campaign, and current Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime Global Fight Against Human Trafficking, she is no stranger to this international issue. This Harvard student-turned Hollywood actress has combined her knowledge on issues with notoriety to bring attention to this global scourge.

Sorvino described human trafficking as the second most profitable illegal activity after drugs, with activities ranging from organ trafficking to parents paying off debt by selling a child into slavery. Seventy-nine percent of victims, she said, are women and girls, with no focus on a particular race or ethnic subgroup. She called human trafficking “illegal slavery,” a “clandestine” enterprise that is “enormously profitable and growing.”

Since 2005, Sorvino has been meeting with human trafficking survivors and learning about their stories. She shared a few with the audience, such as a Mexican woman with a knack for sewing promised a job and imprisoned in a sweatshop; a young teenager promised a housekeeping job and turned into a domestic worker and sex slave under threat of her brother’s death; and a Barcelona trafficker who ran a prostitution ring that trapped Colombian and Brazilian women in indentured servitude.



So, what is being done to stop human trafficking? Though it is the second-most profitable illegal business worldwide, tied with arms sales, Sorvino explained that only \$160 million is spent annually to counteract this problem. She compared that to what the U.S. spends on the war on drugs, and estimated that \$160 million would fund only a few hours of the fight against drug trafficking. Sorvino warned that the comparison is relevant, as criminal organizations are increasingly switching from drugs to human trafficking because of

the potential profits. A bag of cocaine can only be sold once, she said, but you can sell a body many, many times a night.

One audience member asked Sorvino how students can help in the fight against human trafficking. Sorvino had a list of resources ready. From the [Polaris Project](#), CNN's [Freedom Project](#), Ashton Kutcher's [THORN](#) cybersecurity company, to Kevin Bales's [Global Slavery Index](#), Sorvino shared myriad ways for anyone to get informed and involved. She further encouraged students to reach out to their local representatives and organize letter-writing campaigns.

"We don't want to see slavery creeping back into our American way of life," Sorvino stated. "Join the modern abolitionist movement."

This event was hosted by the UCF Global Perspectives office, and supported by the UCF Human Trafficking Awareness Program and Fund, Lester N. Mandell Endowed Distinguished Lecture Series, Orlando Area Committee on Foreign Relations, World Affairs Council of Central Florida and the Global Connections Foundation.