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To Whom it May Concern:

I am the President of the human rights organization Free the Slaves, and Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Roehampton University London, as well as Visiting Professor at the Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation at the University of Hull. I have conducted research into contemporary slavery in person in thirteen countries and written extensively on the subject. I have been a Trustee of Anti-Slavery International and a consultant to the United Nations Global Program on Trafficking of Human Beings. I have been invited to advise the US, British, Irish, Norwegian, and Nepali governments, as well as the governments of the Economic Community of West African States on policy regarding human trafficking and contemporary slavery. I would be happy to provide a more extended record of my publications and experience in this field.

I have carefully reviewed the film *Stolen* with a view to assessing whether it is reasonable to accept the assertions of the film that instances of slavery exist in the refugee camps of the Western Sahara. In 1997 I travelled to Mauritania and conducted research on slavery in that country. At that time I interviewed and observed slaves in several parts of the country and became familiar with their lives and conditions. I subsequently wrote about that research in my book *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (U. of California Press, 1999). Since then I have served as an advisor to the Government of Mauritania on issues concerning contemporary slavery in that country and on policies directed toward its eradication. I have never visited the Western Sahara or visited the refugee camps there. I have, however, spent time in Northern Mauritania near the Western Sahara, and I feel some familiarity with the social and cultural patterns that exist across the region, particularly the patterns of hereditary slavery linked to ethnicity. The population of the region is primarily comprised to three groups: the Hassaniya (or White Moors), the Haratine (which means "ex-slave" but includes the Abd or "slave"), and the Afro-Mauritanians. As far North as the Western Sahara there are few Afro-Mauritanians of the Wolof, Soninke, or Tricolour tribal groups, and the population tends to be mainly those Hassaniya referred to by those interviewed in the film *Stolen* as "white" and the Haratine, often referred to by those interviewed in the film as "black." The patterns of family relationships involving long-term enslavement described in the film match precisely those I have found just to the south of the Western Sahara, and which persist in Mauritania to this day. The nature and pattern of work done by "black" individuals in the film, the nature and pattern of their interaction with "white" families and individuals, the descriptions of their treatment under the informal rules of social participation and interaction, and the descriptions of expectations of control by "white" individuals and families over "black" individuals and families, even when emancipation documents have been issued, all match patterns of interaction and hereditary enslavement I have observed and documented within the region. It is my opinion that the film *Stolen* portrays a situation of enslavement within the refugee camps of the Western Sahara, one that is not out of character with prevailing social patterns within the region. I offer no other judgements on assertions made in the film, which are not related to my area of expertise. I would recommend that if controversy continues over this issue that an independent group be sent to the refugee camps to make an objective assessment and determine in more detail the precise nature of the situation. Such an independent group would need to be assured of non-interference and protection of both it and for any individuals who it might interview.

Best,

Kevin Bales
President
Free the Slaves

Free the Slaves is a non-profit
non-partisan organization
dedicated to ending slavery worldwide
We have 501(c)3 registration
as Anti-Slavery International, Inc

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