

International Justice Mission Launches in The Hague

by Anne Nicole Hofman and Kevin Johnson

One of the most compelling social justice issues of the day is slavery. To hear that there are more men, women and children in forced labor today than at the height of the colonial slave trade evokes disbelief, anger and sadness. For a group of people from CA church plant, Crossroads, The Hague it also evoked holy discontent and resolve. So they did something about it.

International Justice Mission (IJM) combats injustice on more fronts than slavery. They work around the world to help widows who have had their property wrongfully seized, represent those abused by corrupt police and in Jesus name bring justice to those who are oppressed. The Hague is known as the City of International Peace and Justice and plays a crucial role in global human rights policy. It is home to the Peace Palace and International Criminal Court and offers a unique environment from which the global objectives and goals of IJM can be supported. So a handful of Crossroaders with a heart for the oppressed got together and said, "This is the best city in Europe to create a working office for IJM. We are going to make it happen."

The Netherlands team began conversations with leaders of the Washington, DC based organization. IJM's fourfold work to rescue people in bondage, provide aftercare, present prosecutable cases against perpetrators and work for structural transformation was compelling to the team. But while IJM was intrigued by the NL team's idea, they were also a little suspicious of their ability to make it happen. The NL team just kept praying and meeting and dreaming about a working office in The Hague that could represent IJM in Europe, engage in rigorous research to serve the field teams and raise the banner of justice for the oppressed to major players like the EU and UN.

It was amazing to see the team that God put together in The Hague; lawyers and law professors, investigators and magistrates, journalists and web experts, people with concrete field experience in Africa and other locales. And when IJM sent a few key people over to meet the NL team, they bit! In April of 2009, International Justice Mission, The Netherlands was formed.

“Before I learned about IJM, I thought of human trafficking and modern day slavery as an elusive issue at some sort of global level, which I didn’t understand. It wasn’t until someone from IJM told me about a girl named Elizabeth that I truly started to understand the personal stories behind what was happening around me”, says Anne–Nicole Hofman, co–founder of IJM The Netherlands.

Elizabeth’s story is heartbreaking and amazingly powerful. As sister to six younger brothers and sisters living in Southeast Asia, Elizabeth had just finished her sophomore year of high school and decided to work in a neighboring community to save money for college. Tragically, she was betrayed by a friend, kidnapped and sold to a brothel owner. Days later she found herself in a foreign country, forced into a life of prostitution.

Elizabeth prayed every night for God to rescue her, even though other girls in the brothel mocked her. After eight months, an IJM operative secured her freedom. While retrieving her belongings, the IJM team saw Psalm 27 written on the wall above her mattress in her tiny cell–like room: The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid?

The NL team asked IJM’s leaders: “What can we do to help your work?” Now, IJM The Netherlands leverages political will with the Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation, the European Parliament and with other political institutions, mainly for social demand and financial commitment in support of IJM’s casework around the world. On top of that, the team in The Hague seeks to actively educate and mobilize churches and the Christian community in the Netherlands to support the work of IJM and respond to violent oppression of the poor around the world.

And how does the Christian community get involved to support the work of IJM world–wide? While spreading awareness – through speaking at churches, organizations and events, through facilitating Bible studies on God’s heart for Justice and starting justice campaigns – is an effective way to share the passion and mission behind IJM with the local community, GIVING is another way for the Christian community to take action. Giving is the fastest way to complete rescues. And what IJM does in the field is so specialized, and we have abundance of resources (money, materials, expertise), that through giving amazing things can be done toward bringing justice to desperately poor people. Through giving we can bring down the brothel doors.

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