

# RIGHT TO BE FREE

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Dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of trafficked children

February 2014

Issue 2

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Happy National Freedom Day! Right To Be Free would like to recognize this day in 1865 when U.S. President Abraham Lincoln signed the resolution that proposed the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to outlaw slavery. It is unfortunate that Human Trafficking, the modern form of slavery, still exists in our world today.

We are excited to share more information about Right To Be Free and how we are combating human trafficking and our plans to rescue more children from bonded and exploitative labor starting next month.

## Rescue Mission

The RTBF team, led by Eric Peasah, Founder/Director of RTBF/Africa, continues to travel to the islands along Lake Volta, researching trafficked children. These long exhausting trips require a solid four wheel drive vehicle to navigate the unpaved roads and a boat and operator to take the team to the numerous islands along the lake. My daughter and I have participated in a rescue mission so we can attest to the arduous journey. (See documentary at <http://righttobefree.org/video.html>).

Lake Volta, created by the Akosombo Dam, is the world's largest reservoir by surface area (3,275 square miles) and the fourth largest by water volume. This is where children are trafficked and forced to risk their lives every day working in the hazardous fishing trade. Eric has devoted much of his life to fighting human trafficking by actively collaborating with other governments and organizations, sharing his expertise, to effectively address the root causes, in addition to rescuing and rehabilitating its youngest and most vulnerable victims – children.

Eric and his team recently traveled to the Kpando area of the lake, but a heavy storm swept over the lake. Fortunately, they made it safely back to shore but they were forced to call off the research and identification trip due to the dangerous weather. The team resumed the identification trip last week. They visited new areas along the lake where Eric has received reports of children being exploited under bonded labor. This work is in preparation for the rescue mission that will start the first week in March.



# RIGHT TO BE FREE

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Of the numerous children Eric has identified as being most at risk, we hope to rescue 20. They are usually the younger children (the youngest is six years old), and those who show the greatest signs of abuse.

A rescue mission typically consists of more than three trips, over a period of six months, to rescue all the children. Sometimes their masters refuse to release the child, despite previous visits, discussions and agreements with Eric and his team. Therefore, the team must return to follow up with the fisherman in hopes of convincing him to give up the child. No money is ever paid to the fishermen to relinquish their “property”. Instead, Eric offers to provide them with new fishing supplies (e.g. nets), to assist with the creation of a cooperative with other fishermen to create a fish pond along the lake with large nets and feeder fish, or to learn a new vocation such as carpentry or farming.

Enam is one of the 20 children Eric will attempt to free next month. He is seven years old and spends long hours picking fish from the nets or bailing water from the large canoe he sits in every day. When he’s older, he will be forced to dive into the lake to untangle fishing nets, even though he doesn’t know how to swim. Boys often drown when they become entangled in the fishing nets they are trying to free. This underscores the daily perils these children face in addition to the abuse from their masters.



Eric also hopes to rescue Koji (left) and Ebo (right). Koji is eight years old and Ebo is six years old. Ebo told Eric he is scared to dive into the murky lake water to untangle nets, especially when it is dark outside.

# RIGHT TO BE FREE

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When Eric first saw Joshua, barely five years old, he was working on the lake in the pre-dawn hours when it was still chilly. Fortunately, he was wearing a long sleeve shirt. Typically, the children are inadequately dressed. They usually wear threadbare t-shirts, shorts and no footwear. Joshua was too frightened to look at Eric or talk, for fear of being beaten by his master.



Discovered during the 2012 rescue mission, Matthew is about eight or nine years old and has been trafficked for three years. Eric negotiated his release, but the next day when he went to his master's village to pick him up, his master refused. Matthew cried when Eric had to leave without him. Eric continues to communicate with his master to try and secure his freedom.



Daniel was trafficked two years ago when he was six years old. His stoic expression fails to conceal the fear and anxiety that have become his way of life. Trafficked children learn to survive by shutting down their emotions. We hope to bring a smile to his face this year.

# RIGHT TO BE FREE

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## Rehabilitation, Reunification, Reintegration

After a rescue mission, the real work continues. RTBF/Africa's philosophy is that it is not enough to rescue a child. They must be placed in a secure environment to ensure they will not be re-trafficked. We monitor the children and work with their families/guardians to reintegrate them back into their community of origin. They are placed in schools or vocational training is arranged for older children who have been trafficked for many years and returning to school is not a viable alternative.

Traffickers target poor families so micro loans are often provided to create private enterprise opportunities to help families escape poverty that is so severe, parents must make the heart breaking decision to sell their child. Traffickers deceive parents by assuring them their children will go to school in exchange for fishing a few days a week or helping around the house. Parents agree in hopes their children will have a brighter future.

## Kojo

In 2008, Kojo was rescued when he was 14 years old. At that time, he had been working on Lake Volta for four years. A five year old boy named Fenuku worked alongside him. I watched as Kojo repeatedly dove under water to free entangled fishing nets. Fenuku bailed water from the canoe while waiting for Kojo to resurface. Kojo was very protective of Fenuku. He looked after him like an older brother. Enslaved boys refer to each other as their "brothers" since they are the only family they have. Eric rescued Kojo and Fenuku and it was so rewarding to see these boys smile.



*Kojo at the Rehabilitation Center in 2008*

Two years later I returned to Ghana to see how some of the rescued children were doing. I visited Kojo at his school and spoke to his teacher. It was great to see he had gained weight and was thriving. (See documentary for interview with Kojo and his teacher.)

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## Don Bosco NGO Partnership

Don Bosco (DB) is a worldwide organization devoted to supporting the welfare of children. It operates NGO's in Ghana and is building a facility in Tema, a city on the Atlantic coast of Ghana, about 16 miles east of Accra, the nation's capital.

DB heard of Eric's success rescuing and rehabilitating trafficked children and they expressed a desire to partner with RTBF. Specifically, they will assist with the rehabilitation of the rescued children at their newly built child friendly shelter in Tema. The construction of their facility is nearing completion and it will provide an exceptional environment for the rescued children.



*There is a dormitory for girls and another for boys.*



*Dining hall (left) and medical clinic (right in the distance).*

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The Tema facility can house 120 children! Some day we hope to raise enough funds to meet their capacity. In the meantime, our goal this Spring is to raise \$50,000 to continue RTBF/Africa's work and secure the lives and futures of 20 trafficked children.

## **Five For Freedom**

We are excited to announce [Five For Freedom](#), our program where individuals sign up for \$5 monthly donations. We gratefully appreciate donations of any size, single or monthly (you may cancel at any time). A stable source of funding is vital to our work. When we rescue a child, we support their rehabilitation, reunification and reintegration as they adjust to their new freedom and surroundings. This is the challenge that governments and various social welfare agencies struggle with. Once they rescue a child, what next? Unless they have a safe environment to rehabilitate the child that provides counseling and medical services, teaches them life skills (personal hygiene, manners, etc.) and introduces them to the classroom setting, rescuing a child is not enough. Sadly, most countries, including the U.S., have inadequate funding and programs. Unless RTBF has sufficient funds to rehabilitate a child, we cannot responsibly free them.

Therefore, we appeal to those who believe child trafficking must end. If you could forgo purchasing a couple cups of coffee a month or a dinner out once a year, you can help save a child and give them a future of unlimited possibilities. The cycle of poverty cannot be broken if these children remain exploited and abused in bonded servitude. By giving them the gift of freedom and an education, future generations are set on a path of economic independence.

It is our goal to sign up 1,000 [Five For Freedom](#) partners this year to support our program and the rescue and freedom of 20 children. RTBF/U.S. covers all operating expenses so every dollar donated goes directly to supporting the rescue, rehabilitation, reunification and reintegration of victims.

Those who have already donated or signed up for Five For Freedom, we extend our thanks and deep appreciation for your compassion. We look forward to sharing our accomplishments in future newsletters as we protect every child's Right To Be Free.

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