

TEMPLETON REPORT

NEWS FROM THE JOHN TEMPLETON FOUNDATION

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Abolitionism Today

When most people think of slavery, they imagine the wrenching experience of Africans brought in chains to antebellum America. But slavery remains with us today, even though it is largely hidden from the view of the Western public. Modern slavery is far more complex than the chattel servitude familiar to us from the history books. It includes debt-bondage, involuntary domestic servitude, sex trafficking, and shocking varieties of child enslavement.

The John Templeton Foundation has taken an active role in funding the contemporary abolition movement. Last October, with the support of a two-year, \$2.9 million JTF grant, a nonprofit organization called Free the Slaves celebrated heroes of the latter-day global anti-slavery movement. Among the attendees at the organization's second annual Freedom Awards ceremony were the Nobel peace laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the novelist Isabel Allende, and the film stars Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore. Held on the campus of the University of Southern California, the event spotlighted the world's best anti-slavery initiatives, most courageous activists, and most promising leaders, selected from a pool of nearly 200 nominees and applicants.



The 2009 winner of the Harriet Tubman Award for a grassroots anti-slavery organization (a \$25,000 prize) was Shramajivee Mahila Samity (SMS), or the Working Women's Association. SMS fights domestic slavery in India by helping rural communities, which are especially vulnerable to human traffickers, to "slave-proof" their villages. There were two winners of the Frederick Douglass Award, a \$10,000 prize given to a former slave who has used his or her freedom to help others emerging from bondage. One went to Sina Vann, a survivor of sex slavery in Cambodia. The other went to Veero, an illiterate Pakistani woman who escaped debt-bondage slavery, which is illegal but widely practiced in her country.



2009 Freedom Awards winners (left to right, top to bottom): Sina Vann, Veero, Shramajivee Mahila Samity, Betsy Bramon, and Alexis Weiss.

Free the Slaves also awarded two Anne Templeton Zimmerman Fellowships, named in memory of Dr. Jack Templeton's sister, a physician, Templeton Foundation board member, and activist on behalf of international religious freedom and slavery abolition. One of the \$35,000 fellowships went to Alexis Weiss, a former paralegal at the U.S. Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, who helped to smash a sex-slavery ring in the U.S. and has assisted prosecutors in Ghana build cases against slave traders there. The other winner, Betsy Bramon, has conducted research on sex slavery in Amsterdam and Cambodia, with an eye toward developing strategies to help slaves free themselves.

The awards ceremony received extensive coverage from leading U.S. print and Internet publications, including The Huffington Post and The Daily Beast, as well as several international media outlets. Both the 2008 and 2009 Freedom Awards ceremonies aired on Ghana TV throughout West Africa. The Hollywood couple Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore "tweeted" news about the awards to their combined Twitter following of over 6 million fans.

Kimon Sargeant, vice president of human sciences at the Templeton Foundation, attended the ceremony and said it was “one of the most impressive and inspiring events I’ve ever seen.” The 2009 winners, he said, “are inspiring examples of purpose—people bringing progress to the whole world.”

NOTEBOOK

The Age of Empathy

The Foundation recently hosted a Templeton Book Forum conversation between the eminent primatologist Frans de Waal and the science writer Carl Zimmer. In his new book, *The Age of Empathy: Nature’s Lessons for a Kinder Society*, de Waal examines how empathy comes naturally to a great variety of animals, including humans. Video clips from their exchange at the Harvard Club in New York City are now available on the Foundation’s YouTube channel. The discussion ranged widely, from the sense of fairness demonstrated by monkeys given mere cucumbers when others receive grapes to the ways in which empathy can be put to dark purposes, as in the case of torturers and apparent psychopaths like Bernie Madoff.



VIDEO: Author Frans de Waal

The Human Spark

In January, PBS explored the nature of human uniqueness in *The Human Spark*, a three-part series hosted by the actor Alan Alda and supported in part by a \$350,000 grant from the John Templeton Foundation. For the series, the affable Alda, who hosted public television’s popular *Scientific American Frontiers* for more than a decade, visited with dozens of scientists on three continents and participated directly in many experiments.



Alan Alda and friend

In the first program, Alda looked at the 30,000-year-old artwork carved and painted on cave walls in France. The central question of this episode: What do we possess that the Neanderthals didn’t—and where did it come from? In the second installment, Alda joined researchers studying apes, mainly chimpanzees, to discover both what we share with them and the advantages humans have accrued since we went our separate evolutionary ways. The final episode took the audience inside Alda’s head to see the unique circuitry that provides us with our most prized ability, language.

The *Boston Globe* called the show an “appealing documentary approach that addresses hard questions in a casual, accessible way.” PBS program chief John Wilson told the *New York Times* that Alda’s “curious mind” made him a good stand-in for the viewer, rendering science understandable. As Wilson put it, “Never did I feel like I was having to compromise my intelligence.”

For more information, write to communications@templeton.org.

JOHN TEMPLETON FOUNDATION

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