

DNA-ProKids: Forensic Genetics and Human Trafficking

Featuring: Dr. Arthur Eisenberg

One other application I really want to talk about is the program that we've been privileged to get involved in. It's a program actually started by a very close friend of mine at the University of Granada, Doctor Jose Lorente. He started the program a number years ago called DNA-ProKids. [DNA-ProKids](#) was started with the idea of using the same DNA technology we use to solve rapes, murders, burglaries, but now applying that technology to try to help reunite children who have been kidnapped, that have been victims of human trafficking throughout the world. Most people probably don't realize the impact of human trafficking, child trafficking. Human trafficking now recognized as the single largest crime throughout the world.

Literally millions of young women, children who are trafficked each year. And we think we're immune here in the United States, but there's probably hundreds of thousands of active human trafficking involved in prostitution and forced labor that exist here in the United States. You're either a country of where children and women are trafficked from or you're sort of an intermediary country where children and women who were kidnapped are sold. Most of industrial countries are the destination countries, in terms of Western Europe, United States, Japan, Australia; you know there's sort of this insatiable demand for these things.

Texas is probably the portal between into the United States, not probably, is the portal to the United States for women and children coming from South America, Central America through Mexico. You hear about drug trafficking into the United States but not human trafficking. It goes hand-in-hand: arms trafficking, human trafficking coming up through Mexico across the borders into Texas. We're very actively involved in and helping these countries. Again through the Life Technologies foundation we received almost \$1 million in money and reagents and materials to try and not only provide the services, if the countries don't have the ability to do their own testing, between the University of Granada and here providing analysis of samples and helping other countries to develop the capability to test their own samples. So we've been concentrating primarily here in terms of South America Central America and Mexico and the United States. In Southeast Asia, DNA-ProKids has MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with Thailand, Philippines Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Malaysia there sort of a crossroads country along with Indonesia, where once you go through these countries you can go anywhere in the world. It's an amazing program that we've been fortunate to partner with the University of Granada.

And so how does DNA help in human trafficking?

The idea is to establish in these countries two databases: One for the parents whose children disappeared, kidnapped and another database where the children who are found on the streets or rescued from these forced prostitution rings or slave labor type camps, these sweatshops, where children are working 15 hour days essentially for no money. They've either forgotten, or they don't

know where they came from certainly babies have been kidnapped and sold for illegal adoptions. The idea is that we have these databases and we can make comparisons and hopefully reunite children with their parents. Now they're certainly cases where parents are just selling the children. We've been able to identify the mother who is becoming pregnant just to sell her children, where you get multiple children associated with the same mother and things like that. According to the United Nations, human trafficking affects every country in the world. Every country has signed a declaration. The United Nations have a program called UN GIFT United Nations global Initiative to Fight Trafficking and it's under their office of Drug and Crimes. The U.S. State Department is one of the major players in trying to identify countries and try to put pressure on countries to try and do something about human trafficking. We're hoping that DNA-ProKids can be a tool that can be used to... you know it's never going to stop, the best one could ever hope to it is for is to slow down. and then to show that these traffickers using DNA technology there's always associate children with families and find the routes and hopefully identify the traffickers so maybe it can be slowed or deterred.