

Hello there, I'm June Simms. Welcome to As It Is.

David Bowie has been through several changes in his career. But one thing has remained true about the legendary artist. He is full of surprises. Today we tell about a traveling exhibit that documents his life and career.

But first, an Australian-based group has released its first-ever Global Slavery Index. The Walk Free Foundation rated 162 countries based on the prevalence, or incidence, of modern slavery. The study found that tens of millions of people are living in slave-like conditions. Most of them are in Asia. Mario Ritter reports.

A Problem of Modern Slavery Around the World

Slavery is often thought of as a thing of the past. Slavery is banned around the world. But it is a shocking reality today, for nearly 30 million people.

The Global Slavery Index is full of such shocking numbers. Index researcher Kevin Bales says that is why the Walk Free Foundation produced the index: to bring attention to the lives of modern slaves. Mr. Bales spoke to VOA from London. He painted a chilling picture of the life of a slave in 2013.

“I suppose if you’re going to say, what’s the most common type of slave today, I would probably point to two. One would be a type of hereditary slavery in South Asia, where families are born into slavery, they die in slavery, where one family belongs to another family and has for generations. All you know is slavery. You expect to be assaulted. You expect to be raped. You expect no other life except that of a slave.”

He says there is a second, even more common type of modern slave.

“The person who’s an economic hopeful migrant. Someone who’s looking for a way to better their lives, or the lives of their family and their children. And there are criminals who take advantage of that desire and lure people into situations outside their countries where they can then be enslaved.”

In the study, Mauritania had the highest prevalence of modern slavery. The West African nation has a long history of hereditary slavery based on ethnicity. The index estimated that Mauritania holds as many as 160,000 slaves among a population of just 3.8 million people.

India is estimated to have the largest total number of modern slaves. The nation of 1.2 billion is thought to include 14 million people who live in slave-like conditions.

The study found that Asia is home to about 72 percent of the world's slaves. China and Pakistan came in second and third place after India. China is thought to have about 2.9 million slaves. Pakistan is believed to have about 2.1 million slaves.

Also, researchers noted, around the world, more women are affected by slavery than men. This is partly because of the prevalence of forced marriage and child marriage.

Kevin Bales says the experience of girls and women slaves almost always has another, horrifying element.

"For almost every woman in slavery, there will be a sexual assault. It can be field, factory, working as a domestic servant or whatever. That's why the enslavement of women is particularly harsh."

Even the best performers on the index are not without problems. Iceland, Ireland and Britain tied for last place. It is estimated that as many as 4,600 people live in conditions of modern slavery in Britain. I'm Mario Ritter.

"David Bowie is" on Display

An exhibit about David Bowie is making its way across North and South America. The show attempts to answer an important question about this ever-changing artist.

David Bowie - "Changes"

The exhibit is called "David Bowie is" for a good reason. Throughout the performer's 46-year career, defining just who David Bowie is has been an endless game in the media and popular culture. Is he a singer, dancer, actor, rebel, gender-bender or all of the above? The exhibit seeks to capture it all. Geoffrey Marsh helped to organize the show. He says the collection includes some of the costumes David Bowie wore to create his different personas.

"There are original Ziggy Stardust costumes, there is the Pierrot costume from 'Ashes to Ashes.' There's the white duke costumes, the Union Jack frock coat design that David worked up with Alexander McQueen in 96-97 which is on the front cover of 'Earthling'."

David Bowie - "Ziggy Stardust"

"I suppose the next categories of material which are particularly interesting is the original lyrics of -- he's written hundreds of songs and in the exhibition there's lyrics for about 17 of them."

The exhibit includes artwork created by the performer, summary sheets with ideas for his record albums, his costume designs and other things. Together, these items show just how much work went into creating the many identities he took on over the years. As Marsh points out, David Bowie has always been an invention.

“Lots and lots of people say ‘I’ve met David Bowie/I’ve interviewed David Bowie.’ The source of David Bowie doesn’t exist. The person who was born on the 8th of January 1947 is someone called David Robert Jones. David Bowie is a sort of construction.”

The exhibit “David Bowie is” continues in Toronto, Canada until November 27th. Then it travels to the city of Chicago, Illinois. Next year, the show travels to Sao Paulo, Brazil and then back to Europe.

David Bowie – “Space Oddity”

That is As It Is. Thanks for joining us. Have a question or comment about our show? We would love to hear from you. Send an email to learningenglish@voanews.com.

VOA world news is coming up at the beginning of the hour, Universal Time.