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SPEAKS EXCLUSIVELY TO
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3-in-1 The Voice



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Meet Steve Norman

Director of Ratanak UK

Introduction

Steve Norman is a committed Christian in the truest sense of the word. Practical, hands on and compassionate, Steve has worked tirelessly since 2008 for International Charity Ratanak. As Director in the UK, since 2009 Steve has witnessed some of the world's worst atrocities against children, inhumane acts that just beggar belief. Armed with his faith in the saving power of Jesus, Steve has continued to battle in the front line for the rights of these children.

Ratanak is more than a charity, it is fast becoming a movement in the days in which we live and is convincing more and more people that we need to take a practical stand for these children and that we cannot afford to turn our backs.

Steve and many of his staff and volunteers throughout the world are continually battling for the human rights of these young children in Cambodia. Sex trafficking is a 'norm' there and young girls (as young 5 years) are facing betrayal and abuse by family members, all in the name of money.

As we witness an increase in the abuse of women and young girls globally, it is my privilege to introduce you to one man and the charity he represents, who bring the message that all is not lost and we can in fact make a huge difference to people's lives with the love and compassion of Jesus.

AK Chenoweth



Pictured above: Steve Norman

Director Ratanak UK



Biography



In April 2008, Steve Norman, a serving Police Officer, chanced upon an article in a Sunday newspaper supplement about a girl sold into prostitution in Cambodia at the age of 13. The next day he bought the book and read it through that night into the next day. It was through this experience that God broke his heart and placed therein a deep compassion for the children of this land who have no voice and endure such unimaginable suffering. The overwhelming desire to engage in this issue was impressed on him.

Following numerous fruitless searches and being advised that it was an area best avoided, Steve happened upon Ratanak International in Canada. Over the following months and the exchange of countless emails and calls, the prospect of developing the Ratanak in the UK became a reality. In June 2009 Ratanak International (UK) was formally born.

In September 2009 Steve travelled to Cambodia where he was able to meet Ratanak partners and see firsthand the situations that exist. This visit cemented his resolve to work to make a difference to the lives of as many people as possible. In April 2010, Ratanak International (UK) received its charitable status with the UK Charities Commission.

Steve is a committed Christian and has been married to Karen for 25 years. They have three children aged 24, 23 and 2! They also have a 7 year old grand-daughter and an 18 month old grandson. Steve and Karen live in rural North Yorkshire and are members of Influence Church, Richmond (www.influencechurch.co.uk).



Interview – Steve Norman

1. Steve how did you come to know the Lord Jesus as your savior?

As a child, and through my teens, I had a rebellious streak. At 14 I was a self-declared atheist and had no room or time for God.

This began to change when I was 19 and attended my step-fathers mums' funeral in a very small Elim church in Scarborough in the North of England. I was overwhelmed by the peace at the service and begun to ask some searching questions. A few short weeks later I began work as a Police Officer and attended training school. Here I found that one of my instructors was a Christian and I was taken with how different his life was from mine. Despite the repeated to events by him I held fast to my disbelief always finding excuses not to talk in depth.

Strangely, from training school, I found myself posted to Scarborough! It was here that I met what I thought was to be my wife. We courted, got engaged and separated all within 6 weeks! Devastated I went to my parents for a few days and bought a new car, vowing that I was done with relationships! Two days after picking the car up from the garage I was invited to an Easter celebration at a church where my mum and step father were attending. My attendance was conditional on being able to take my new car and, much to my surprise and initial disappointment - they agreed.

On arrival we took our seats and waited for the start. As the music begun I immediately started to cry. Try though I may to conceal this and stop it happening it continued. Art Sheppard from Canada took to the stage and spoke about the cross and what Christ had done there for me. Throughout this I continued to sob. He closed and made an invitation for those who would like to know Christ to raise a hand. I decided that this was not for me and refused to comply. My hand, however, was not in agreement with my head and was held aloft for all to see. I was the sole respondent. He then invited me to the front of the auditorium and again I chose not to comply though my feet this time disagreed with my head and there I was stood at the front alone and weeping! There on Good Friday 1986 I asked Jesus into my life.

I returned to my seat and the meeting closed where we were encouraged to say hello to someone we didn't know. I turned round to do this and found, sat in the chair directly behind me, a lovely young lady! We chatted and arranged to meet on Easter Monday back at the conference. That day we chatted some more and exchanged numbers. Within the month we had been on our first date, where I locked my keys in the car 100 miles from the spares. Three months later on my 21st birthday we were engaged and married 10 months after that. Karen and I have 3 children aged 26, 24 and 4 and have now been married 27 years! So much for the resolve to avoid women. And the new car... well I sold that when we got married to help kit out our first home together!

Karen was brought up in church but at the time she came to the Good Friday service had been away from God for a while. She later told me that she knew she had to go as she was going to meet someone there! The only seat in the whole auditorium of over 400 people free on her arrival was the one directly behind me!

2. Ratanak is an unusual word, what does it mean and how did come about the organization was named this?

Ratanak is a child's name. In this case it was a little girl who featured on a documentary called Year 10 by John Pilger in 1989. It was filmed 10 years after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge and at a time when Cambodia remained isolated from the rest of the world. On the documentary Ratanak died from Dengue fever, she was just 11 months old. All she needed was penicillin but embargoes saw to it that there was none. The organisation was named in her honour. The name Ratanak is translated as 'Precious Gem'.



Steve with wife Karen

3. What compelled you to get involved with Ratanak UK?

In April 2008 I was at home one Sunday afternoon and in a pretty restless mood. Out of boredom I picked up a supplement out of a newspaper and started to thumb through it. It was all adverts for devices aimed at saving me valuable hours, that was until I reached a page near the end and was captivated by the headline. The article was an excerpt from a book and told of sex trafficking in Cambodia and one woman's experiences. At this time I didn't even know where Cambodia was!

The next day I found a single copy of the book and, through that night, read it cover to cover. I was deeply troubled by what I read but tried to move on. I couldn't. I spent many hours awake thinking about what I had read and how I could do something.

After chatting with a friend we arranged to organize an event to raise funds to help. That was where the problems started! I had the job of tracking down an appropriate organisation who were addressing the issue of child sex trafficking. I struggled and, despite several emails, failed in my quest. Then I found information about a Christian missions conference on Cambodia and booked in. It was there that I listened to some wonderful things but nothing about the issue that still troubled me. At lunch I chatted to the CEO of the organisation and shared my heart. He stopped eating and looked at me saying, 'Steve, stay away from this. It's too difficult and too dangerous.'

I was incensed by what he said and left the event. The next few weeks were torturous as I continued to look for answers. Then one day I came home from work, flung my Bible on

the bed and shouted at God to help. In hindsight that may have been a better place to start than the internet 9 months previous! It fell open at Ezekiel 22 and verses 29 and 30 seemed to lift off the page. The light came on and I realized that maybe it was me who had to be the one who did something.

I went back to the internet where I found Ratanak International on the first search. Based in Canada and run by Brian McConaghy who worked for the Police at that time. We connected and in May 2009 Brian made the trip to the UK. As he was leaving I committed to starting Ratanak in the UK.

In September 2009 I travelled to Cambodia where I encountered the ugly face of human trafficking directly. My resolve was cemented to move this forward and on return I printed off the forms to apply for charitable status. All went well until I reached the bottom of the form where I was asked to confirm that we raised £5,000 a year. At that time we had little over £200! I began to lose heart a little.

Two days later I received an email from a church in Northern Ireland asking if they could send a cheque from their missionary account. Three days after that I arrived home from work to an envelope. For probably the first time in my life I was speechless as I held a cheque for £5,000! I completed the forms and in March 2010 we receive charitable status.

Around 3 years ago I was in a church for a talk when I put a map on the screen of where Cambodia was. I was immediately silenced as my mind raced back 14 years to a time of prayer at the end of another Easter conference. Here God placed a map in my head of where he was calling me to. I forgot about it until that moment when I looked at the screen on the exact map! He is faithful to what he calls us to even when we really don't understand what that looks like or forget all about it. In his time he moved this forward.

4. Have you been to Cambodia? If so what was your first experience like there?

I have now been 3 times. My first experience was crazy. I had been to Africa previously and had seen poverty so figured I would not be shocked. How wrong I was. The first thing that struck me (not literally!) was the traffic and craziness of the place! It was mental! The heat and humidity were intense and when it rained it was in waterfalls and not drops!

The trip was for 14 days with Brian. He introduced me to the history of the killing fields and we stood in a place where thousands of people were horrendously tortured and were then killed. My emotions were everywhere.

We then visited many of the programmes Ratanak supported at the time and I spent a lot of time with and looked into the eyes of children who were being sold daily for sex. Some were as young as just 5 years old. I then had to walk away and leave them. That's one of the hardest things I have ever done.

Conversely I met kids who had been rescued and now had a hope and a future. I saw this hope in their eyes and determined to support a home for these little ones within three years. In reality, due to a very generous donation we were able to do that within 3 months!

Cambodia is beautiful but it has been so badly hurt. The pain from the 1975-79 genocide lingers. Poverty is extreme with 40% existing on less than \$2 a day. And yet in the midst there is a hope.

When the wheels of the plane left the tarmac I cried (again). I knew that I had found my heartland, the place where God had been preparing me for through the previous years.



One thing that really struck me was the openness to the Gospel. People do not respond here because they are preached to or at – they respond to the love of committed Christians who serve tirelessly. They see the love and experience care in a culture where it can be alien and want to know why. This, for me at least, is the heart of Christ in action.

5. What is the set up in Cambodia for rescuing the children? Is there a sanctuary? Orphanage? Church?

Yes there are rehabilitation centers buildings and programs for those at risk and those rescued.

We mostly work in the area of rural child trafficking prevention in the villages and in the preparation of girls, after completing rehabilitation, that need to reintegrate back into society. This is one of the most difficult challenges given the almost complete destruction of self esteem. Education, job skills, stability, life coaching and constant encouragement

are all vital. We partner with church communities as safe environments for initial community reintegration.

6. How much does prayer play a part in this ministry?

Massive! There are definitely strongholds and without prayer we would achieve nothing.

7. How does your sponsorship work?

We receive support from individuals and organisations towards current programmes. We don't do traditional individual sponsorship – much as we would love to. The security and privacy issues are too great for trafficking victims. To this end we only do "project funding" without particular names or individuals identified.

We send out a quarterly newsletter and interim updates including prayer requests. You can sign up for these using the email at the end of this interview!

8. How are your workers protected whilst working in this dangerous environment?

Prayer is key but on a practical level, while there are risks, the most important thing is to have good relationships within the community and a good understanding of the environment so risk can be accurately assessed and managed.

9. Are there other ways of giving to your organization?

People often ask me that and it's quite hard to sum up. We can't take large missions groups to these environments. There are safety issues and it isn't fair to the men, women and children who are the victims. We do take small groups of people who have been involved with us for a while and looking to get involved on a more practical level.

I'm always drawn to the story of Moses stood at the Red Sea and facing death from drowning or the Egyptian army. He has in his hands his staff – a stick! God simply asks him the question, 'What is in your hands?' We all know what happens then.

Each of us have talents and gifts which are different and we can use these to raise awareness, funds, lobby governments, etc.

In 2011 I was in Cambodia with a couple who joined us as part of their honeymoon. Tim is a photographer and the following year returned to Cambodia for 6 weeks where he taught young women. I heard just last week that one of those young ladies is now a mentor to others in the programme and is at university studying to be a professional photographer. Before Tim went she had never picked a camera up before.

Like I say – we all have the talents. The question is – will we use them?

10. What is the ultimate goal for Ratanak?

The rebuilding of Cambodia from the ashes of genocide into a country of justice, peace and joy through the introduction of the awareness that there is a God who loves them and gave his Son to die for them.

On a practical level trauma and suffering is addressed one life at a time through loving them, ministering to them with compassion and care no matter how difficult the circumstances.

Web site address – www.ratanakuk.org email – info@ratanakuk.org



Hope and freedom from exploitation, abuse and poverty in Cambodia

To Donate or Get involved with RATANAK UK
please contact Steve:

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