



CASABLANCA DECLARATION

For the universal **abolition of surrogacy**

Olivia Maurel, spokesperson of Casablanca Declaration

I would like to thank the event hosts for inviting me to speak my truth and warn people on the dangers of surrogacy from the perspective of a surrogate born child, a woman and a mother, but also as the spokesperson of the Declaration of Casablanca. I'm especially glad that the universal abolition of surrogacy has become a priority that transcends diverse ideological worldviews and political positions. It's great that all of us present here today can focus on this urgent issue despite our own differences. This proves that we must ALL start discussing this issue to protect the rights of children and women that has become an urgent matter, so urgent that the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, Reem Alsalem, will dedicate her report in October 2025 to the United Nations General Assembly on surrogacy.

So as a short introduction, I am Olivia Maurel, 33 years old, married and the mother of 3 incredible children. I am an atheist and I'm a big believer in fighting for human rights, for a just society in general, and I am also a very proud feminist wishing to fight for women's rights, and a very big advocate for children's rights in this very particular world we live in today. But what really brought me here today to speak in front of all of you, is my very particular story: I am a pure **product** of surrogacy, **pure product that has been advocating very harshly against surrogacy since June 2023** on social media and by joining the Declaration of Casablanca which aims towards the universal abolition of the practice by the use of an international treaty, I became very proudly their spokeswoman.

I came into the world through surrogacy, in Louisville, Kentucky, in the United-States, on the 10th of December 1991. A date that will be forever engraved in my heart as it is the day that my country, the United States of America, by letting surrogacy be legal, asked me to pay a high price as a newborn, to be able to satisfy a couple's desire to have children: that is to lose my mother forever. This trauma caused me many harms during my life: I sunk into drugs, alcohol, I'd always put myself on the edge to fill the void of having lost my mother and my origins and I even committed several suicide attempts. At the time, I was going through a huge identity crisis: how could I possibly know who I was without knowing where I came from?

It wasn't until my 30th birthday that my husband's mother offered me a DNA test that would provide me physical proof that I had been born from a surrogate. This DNA test showed my real ethnic background, but also connected me with my cousin, my uncle, my half-brother, my half-sisters, and eventually, my biological mother with whom I exchanged a great conversation. This relieved me from many questions I had in my head, but left me with great pain knowing that my surrogate mother had been an easy prey for the surrogacy market already back in the day. My story is now in a book that I have written and that will be coming out on the 19th of February entitled "Where are you, mommy?".

Today's event title is "Surrogacy, the modern day slavery", so, instead of talking about the child's perspective, I want to speak today about surrogacy and argue that, when we examine the practice closely, it does indeed represent a modern-day form of slavery.



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The notion of surrogacy has gained considerable attention in recent years. Whether motivated by medical purposes or social purposes, surrogacy is marketed worldwide as a “noble and altruistic service”. However, beneath the surface, there are serious ethical, moral, and human rights concerns that mirror the atrocities of slavery.

To understand why surrogacy is a modern-day form of slavery, we must define what slavery is. Historically, slavery has been defined as the condition in which one person is treated as property and is deprived of personal freedom, subjected to the will of another for economic gain. Surrogacy, in all its forms, shares several alarming parallels to this definition of slavery.

1. The Dehumanization of women

The first parallel that I want to make between surrogacy and slavery is the dehumanization of women. Let us first consider how women are often treated as mere vessels, as objects in the surrogacy process. Surrogacy transforms a woman into a commodity, a tool to achieve the desires of another. In this system, her body is reduced to a womb, and her emotional and physical well-being is secondary to the goals of the commissioning parents or parent. The lack of regard for her autonomy and personhood is alarming.

Women, especially those in less privileged economic situations, may be compelled to enter into surrogacy agreements out of financial desperation. While we often hear stories of women choosing surrogacy out of kindness or generosity, it is crucial to remember that the vast **majority are forced to do so for monetary reasons**. They are often presented with the illusion of a better life in exchange for renting out their bodies and enduring an exhausting and dangerous pregnancy for others’ gain. Who would undergo huge doses of hormones, risking their lives, going through a pregnancy, giving birth, and giving their child away, for free? If we were to take ALL the money out of the equation and reimburse no fees, would women align to go through all of this? Would mothers give away their babies for free? I do not think so.

Much like the slaves of the past, these women’s autonomy is compromised, and they are left with little choice but to comply with the demands of those with more power and wealth.

2. The Exploitation of Poverty

The second parallel between slavery and surrogacy that we must consider is the exploitation of poverty. In many parts of the world, particularly in developing countries, women are offered substantial amounts of money to be surrogates. The promise of financial stability can be incredibly enticing, but we must ask ourselves—why is it that wealthy individuals or couples from more affluent nations are able to exploit poor women for their reproductive needs? This is a deeply exploitative practice that mirrors the exploitation of enslaved people throughout history, who were often forced into labor out of financial desperation. We have never seen a rich woman be a surrogate for a poor woman.

I believe that the minimum wage in Albania is 385 euros (40 000 lek approximately). What woman would refuse a 7000 euro check, or all of her daily fees reimbursed like her food, clothes, cell phone bills when working in this country in a normal job she is earning so little? Why would a country like Albania want to legalize surrogacy and put their women into such a horrible situation in which, to survive or offer a better life for their children, these women would have to rent their wombs by financial desperation, reducing them to reproductive slaves? Albanian women need more protection and need to be protected from the greedy surrogacy companies that are just out there waiting to use them and their bodies to generate millions.

Recently, we have seen many cases of exploitation of women for surrogacy in the news:

- In 2021, a Turkish fertility clinic was targeting vulnerable young women, including minors, from a working-class neighborhood with promises of financial gain through surrogacy. They were drugged at home, in Turkey, for 12 days, then trafficked to Georgia and Northern Cyprus using falsified documents.



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- 169 women were trafficked in a scandal concerning Greece in 2023. These women were brought by force and obligated to produce babies for foreign couples. These women were brought from Ukraine, Romania, Georgia and even Albania. Greece is a country in which surrogacy is legal and “altruistic” must I remind you, which proves that opening the surrogacy market in a country doesn’t stop the black market from flourishing. Might I make the parallel that slavery has been illegal for a long time, but there are still 30 million slaves in the world today. Would we legalize or regulate slavery because slaves still exist to make their lives “easier”? No because it is unethical. The same applies to surrogacy.
- Just a few days ago, it was reported that 100 women were kept as slaves on a human farm in Georgia where they were fed hormones and treated like cattle. These women were brought from Thailand, poor, so desperate that they fell into a trap by being lured in by a job offer on Facebook, promising them between 11 000 and 17 000 euros to work as surrogates for Georgian couples. They evidently never got their money.
- Another recent case has shined the light on a cross border trafficking with both Georgian and Turkish women becoming surrogate mothers, along with cases of children being transported across borders with falsified documents. One example involved a Turkish surrogate mother who went through an embryo transfer in Georgia and then was transported 3 months prior to giving birth to Thailand, where she delivered a baby for a single Chinese man.

These are just a few examples of what we know. If Albania were to legalize surrogacy, this would be letting the door wide open for human trafficking to begin. Regulating automatically opens the door to trafficking, thus making abolition the ONLY solution possible.

Moreover, while wealthy commissioning parents might get what they want—a child delivered to their doorstep—you have to understand that the surrogates are often left with very little once the child is born: they face pressure to give up any legal rights to the child and receive no continued care or support. Once the baby is delivered and if they have complications due to the surrogacy, they must deal with it on their own. On top of this, the surrogate's connection to the child, a bond formed during pregnancy, is dismissed, and the surrogate's emotional and physical well-being are left to the wayside.

3. The Commercialization of Reproductive Labor

The third parallel that we must make between surrogacy and slavery is the commercialization of reproductive labor. Surrogacy is an exchange of reproductive labor. In this system, women are paid to be pregnant, to carry children, and to fulfill a biological function for someone else. What is often neglected in these arrangements is the immense toll this takes on a woman’s body, mind, and personal life. It is labor that is commodified, stripped of its emotional and biological significance, and viewed purely as a transaction.

When we think of slavery, we recognize the labor imposed on enslaved individuals as being forced and unpaid. In surrogacy, though the women are paid directly or indirectly (as there is always money exchanged), it is important to remember that the nature of the transaction is exploitative. The amount of money a surrogate receives is often a fraction of what the commissioning parents pay. The agency, the doctors, the lawyers and all the people in-between the deal take a substantial cut, leaving the surrogate with a small portion of the agreed-upon sum.

This disproportionate distribution of funds further highlights the parallels with slavery, where those who perform the labor—those whose bodies are used—receive only a fraction of the wealth generated. The wealthy commissioning parents and agencies profit the most, while the women providing the labor remain underpaid, undervalued, and at risk of exploitation.

4. Lack of Legal Protections and Rights



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The fourth parallel that we must make is the lack of legal protections and rights. One of the most disturbing aspects of surrogacy is the lack of legal protections for the surrogate mother. In many places, surrogates are not afforded the same rights as mothers who carry and raise their own biological children. In many countries, surrogacy contracts are legally binding, and women who enter these contracts often sign away their legal rights to the child. This raises serious questions about the extent to which a woman's personhood is respected within the framework of surrogacy.

For example, a surrogate may be forced to adhere to strict contractual agreements, dictating what she can eat, how much exercise she can do, if she can have intimate relations with her husband, if she can travel, or even whether she can undergo medical procedures. If something goes wrong during the pregnancy, the surrogate may have little to no recourse. And after the birth, she is legally obligated to hand over the child, even if she has developed an emotional attachment. These conditions echo the dehumanizing practices of slavery, where individuals had no autonomy over their bodies, health, or relationships.

5. The Ethical and Moral Question

Finally, we must examine the ethical and moral questions that arise from the practice of surrogacy. Is it ethical to allow the rich to exploit the labor of the poor for their personal desires? Is it morally acceptable to treat women as tools for reproduction, commodifying their bodies to create children for others? And what about the children involved—what future might they have when they are born into a system that reduces them to property rather than recognizing their intrinsic humanity?

These are hard questions, but they are necessary to ask if we are to confront the reality of surrogacy. It is crucial that we critically analyze the practice, not just as a means of reproduction but as a human rights issue. Are we comfortable with the idea that, in the modern world, women are being forced into servitude for the benefit of others? **Are we comfortable with the idea that the reproduction of life is being commercialized, treated as a business transaction?** A new study shows that the surrogacy market reached 21.85B dollars in 2024 and is expected to reach 195B dollars by 2034, in 10 years' time. What is interesting to note is that the explosive growth is predominantly concentrated in Europe and North America, where surrogacy is legal and regulated. This shows that legalizing surrogacy is just letting this new age slavery grow exponentially.

In conclusion, when we look at surrogacy through the lens of power dynamics, exploitation, and the treatment of women's bodies as commodities, it becomes clear that it shares many of the same characteristics as the institution of slavery. Women's autonomy is stripped away, their bodies are commodified, and they are often left vulnerable to exploitation and harm. The wealthy and powerful continue to profit from their reproductive labor, and the voices of the women affected are often silenced or ignored.

It is time that we reconsider the ethics of surrogacy and take steps to protect the women involved, ensuring that their rights and dignity are respected. We must demand the universal ban of surrogacy and thus put an end to the exploitation of the most vulnerable for the benefit of the rich and powerful. This is exactly what we, at the Declaration of Casablanca are asking: an international treaty to end this horror that is surrogacy.

On December the 6th this year marks the 160th anniversary of the ratification of the 13th amendment to the US constitution that ended slavery for good. We cannot go back 160 years and start legalizing this modern day slavery which is surrogacy, it would be insane.

I will end with this simple question: Albania, are you willing to open your country to the relentless surrogacy market that will put Albanian women at huge risk of exploitation and trafficking? I hope the answer to this question is no.

Thank you for listening.



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