

2010 Frederick Douglass Award Winner

James Kofi Annan | Ghana

At age six, James Kofi Annan was sold into slavery. He worked in Ghana's fishing villages 17 hours a day. Food and shelter were scant. Abuse was constant. Seven years later, James escaped back home to his parents. His mom was overjoyed. His father? Not so much.



Frederick Douglass Award

is given to an individual who has survived slavery and is using their life in freedom to help others. The award honors the

tremendous resilience of the human spirit, and emphasizes that many survivors of modern-day slavery go on to help others to freedom. Named after an escaped slave who became an influential author, diplomat and abolitionist, and helped persuade President Lincoln to end American slavery with the Emancipation Proclamation.



From Illiteracy to College

At 14, James couldn't read or write. Somehow he believed that if he could only learn English, his life would get better. He befriended kindergartners so he could use their schoolbooks to learn to read. He worked to feed himself and pay for school. On standardized exams his scores broke records that have yet to be topped. James persevered and graduated college. His academic excellence landed him a job at Barclays Bank. His English? You guessed it. Perfect.

His Mission to Protect Children

With freedom and education came the responsibility to guard his community. James is fueled by equal parts anger and love. For the last 13 years, he has worked to end modern-day slavery.



In 2003, he started **Challenging Heights** to empower children through education. Every day, vulnerable children turn to Challenging Heights for homework help, sports and the arts. In some villages James has created innovative peer programs with children and adults approaching kids and parents to get local children in school and away from sweet-talking traffickers. James regularly funded Challenging Heights with more than half of his bank salary.

Challenging Heights is now a Free the Slaves frontline partner in Ghana.

Find out more about our work in Ghana [here](#).

A Lifetime Commitment

Last year, James quit his lucrative job to dedicate himself to Challenging Heights full-time. He opened a new school where dozens of former child slaves study with children vulnerable to trafficking. Former child slaves take refuge and begin to heal. The other children become less likely to be trafficked.

James is also back in school getting a Master's degree in communication. He figures it will help him spread the word about vulnerable children in Ghana. For James, ending slavery is a full-time, lifelong commitment. The children at Challenging Heights affectionately named him Senior James. Senior wants one of his students to break his longstanding academic records. Senior's triumph paves their way.