

# World Peace Herald

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## Analysis: Trafficking Modern-Day Slavery

By Al Swanson, UPI Urban Affairs Correspondent

CHICAGO – They are strangers in strange lands: foreigners forced into prostitution, exploited as illegal domestic servants or worked dirt cheap as laborers in the most dangerous and demeaning situations.

With only limited language and work skills, these immigrants are so far out of sight they're practically invisible.

On Feb. 27 federal agents and police raided five illegal sex spas in the heart of Middle America, Rockford, Ill., where undocumented Chinese and Korean women were locked inside shops of prostitution. The young women not only worked in the tiny rooms – they lived in “safe rooms” as virtual slaves not allowed to go outside. Ten suspects face federal racketeering, money laundering and conspiracy charges in the crackdown.

Seven women believed to be victims of human trafficking face deportation. Three others were charged with prostitution, and a fourth, a U.S. citizen, was charged with hiring prostitutes. Victims of human trafficking may be eligible for asylum through a special “T visa” if they testify against people who smuggled them into the country, but often they won't out of fear and intimidation.

The U.S. State Department estimates between 600,000 and 800,000 people are illegally trafficked worldwide each year and that 14,500 to 17,500 arrive in the United States from Eastern Europe, Russia, Asia, South and Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean and Africa. More than half become victims of sexual exploitation.

“There are three main reasons for trafficking: for sex, for farm servitude and for children soldiers,” Ambassador John R. Miller, who heads the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, told the Rockford Register Star.

“When it hits a community like Rockford, people are usually shocked or surprised that human trafficking – which is a euphemism for the slave trade – is in their community.”

Vice cops have seen an increase in the number of non-English-speaking prostitutes working in Chicago, where human trafficking is nothing new.

Social service agencies say many women come with promises of jobs as nannies and housekeepers but end up owing so much to smugglers they're caught in a web of exploitation working 20-hour days and sleeping in back rooms because they fear contact with police or authorities.

There are an estimated 11 million undocumented aliens in the United States, 6 million Hispanic, according to the Pew Hispanic Research Center. More than 10 percent are children. Undocumented aliens were defined as those who entered the country without valid documentation or overstayed or violated terms of a visa.

"True trafficked people are something of a hidden population," Dr. Chris Beyrer, associate professor of epidemiology and international health at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health in Baltimore, told *amednews.com*. "They may not be very aware of victims' rights and benefits and will be very fearful."

The AMA National Advisory Council on Violence and Abuse and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provide warning signs for doctors to use to screen and identify victims in the "Rescue and Restore Victims of Human Trafficking" awareness campaign.

Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich Sunday formed a multi-agency task force to give law enforcement and social workers better tools to find and help victims.

"Human trafficking is a modern day form of slavery, and sadly it exists here in Illinois," said Blagojevich. "Young children, teenagers, men and women are promised jobs and better lives and are brought to the United States. But once they're here, they are forced to live and work in abysmal conditions, they're paid pitiful wages, and some are forced into the sex trade."

Illinois State Police and workers in the state departments of human services, labor, human rights and children and family services will receive training to help victims from the Illinois Rescue and Restore Coalition.

About 1,000 health, social service and law-enforcement agencies that would be first-responders to trafficking victims are invited to join the coalition and receive training.

"Trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labor is a hidden reality in Illinois that is simply unacceptable," said Joseph Antolin, vice president of the Chicago-based Heartland Alliance for Human Rights & Human Needs.

Illinois lawmakers proposed two bills making involuntary servitude, sexual servitude of a minor and trafficking of humans for forced labor and services a felony requiring restitution.

Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano signed legislation Tuesday cracking down on so-called coyotes – criminals who smuggle people across the Mexican border into the United States – and human traffickers who recruit and force immigrants into forced labor or prostitution.

The Louisiana Legislature is considering outlawing trafficking of humans for commercial sex purposes or work as slaves. Penalties would range from 10 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine to 25 years in prison and a \$25,000 fine if a minor was involved.

About 24 countries have enacted laws against human trafficking.

Involuntary servitude is a federal crime under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000.

“Thanks to the efforts of Congress, countries that do not make significant efforts to confront slavery face the threat of losing non-trade related, non-humanitarian forms of U.S. assistance,” Miller said in testimony this month before the House International Relations Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations.

The U.S. Agency for International Development is spending more than \$144 million to protect children in areas devastated by December’s Asian tsunami disaster. Some developing countries are destinations for child sex tourism, in which people travel overseas to exploit children in a country with lax law enforcement.

World Vision is conducting a public-awareness campaign on sex tourism in Thailand, Cambodia, Costa Rica and the United States. The State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons releases its fifth annual report on human trafficking in June.

“We have seen a surge in government activity around the world: the passage of new anti-trafficking laws, almost 3,000 convictions of traffickers last year, national public service announcements and much more,” Miller said. “We don’t think it is a coincidence that increased anti-trafficking efforts coincided with the imposition of sanctions in 2003.”

Miller said the U.S. military and Defense Department civilian employees deployed overseas receive training about the government’s zero-tolerance policy for human trafficking of women and children in shelters and camps.

The United Nations has a similar code of conduct for peacekeepers although an internal report documented sex-abuse crimes against refugees by U.N. peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In some cases very young girls were given food or a pittance for sex.

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