

The Source on Women's Issues in Congress

April 29, 2005 (volume 10, number 48)

Panel Addresses Trafficking of Women and Girls

On April 28, the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Domestic and International Monetary Policy, Trade and Technology heard testimony concerning domestic and international human trafficking.

In her opening remarks, Chair Deborah Pryce (R-OH) stated, "Sex-trafficking is a problem that isn't typically discussed on television or at the dinner table. It's a problem that occurs behind closed doors, a problem that preys on the vulnerable and destroys so many human spirits. Trafficking is a problem that is built on lies and deception, as most of the victims are lied to and coerced into it without their knowledge or permission. It's a problem that affects an estimated 800,000 women, men, and children worldwide each year alone. But the reality is that human trafficking isn't an issue that's isolated to countries far away. Sadly, more and more women and children – up to 20,000 – are being trafficked across our nation's borders and within our borders, into backyards in the United States."

After the hearing, Rep. Pryce and Ranking Member Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) held a press conference to announce their introduction of the End Demand for Sex Trafficking Act of 2005 (as-yet-unnumbered). The bill would authorize \$15 million through FY2007 for a grant program to encourage the development and implementation of demand-side strategies for the enforcement of anti-trafficking laws. Grants could be used for prosecution efforts against purchasers of unlawful commercial sex or traffickers, and could be made available for nongovernmental organizations that provide services for trafficking victims.

Ambassador John Miller, director of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons at the State Department, highlighted U.S. efforts to combat trafficking. He said that in June, his

office would issue the 2005 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, explaining that the annual report “has achieved very promising results. For instance, in the months leading up to and directly following the 2003 and 2004 [reports], we saw a surge in government activity around the world: the passage of new anti-trafficking laws, increased prosecutions of traffickers, national public service announcements and much more.” He also noted that his office would continue to coordinate U.S. financial assistance for anti-trafficking programs around the world, including more resources for public awareness campaigns.

Addressing financial implications that would fall under the subcommittee’s jurisdiction, Ambassador Miller stated, “Human trafficking fuels organized crime, and there is a great danger in this, because where organized crime flourishes, governments and the rule of law are weakened, and people suffer. According to the Congressional Research Service, human trafficking is considered the third largest source of profits for organized crime worldwide after the arms and drug trades, and the U.S. Government estimates it generates \$5.9 billion in annual revenue. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime has concluded that the globalization of trafficking has allowed crime groups formerly active in specific routes or regions to expand the geographical scope of their activities to explore new markets.” He added, “More research is needed for us to get a better understanding of just how traffickers and organized crime groups are using the modern-day slave trade to launder money and finance other criminal activities. Your subcommittee can play a vital role in improving our understanding in this area.”

Citing an article that reported a decreasing number of prostitutes in Sweden after the country decriminalized prostitution, Rep. Maloney asked Ambassador Miller if there were other countries that had made efforts in this area. He named Korea, which continues to prosecute women for prostitution but also for the first time prosecutes men for soliciting a prostitute, but pointed out that the law had just been enacted so there were few results. Ambassador Miller also stated that in his experience, legal prostitution increases the demand for trafficking because it creates “magnets” that draw more trafficking victims to those countries where prostitution is legal.

Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA) expressed her concern that legal mechanisms exist to combat trafficking but the United States has ignored them. Referring to the Convention on the

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), she pointed out that the treaty specifically addresses the trafficking of women and girls and asked why the United States had not ratified it. Ambassador Miller explained that the Bush administration's objections to CEDAW were not related to the trafficking provision. He also noted that the administration had signed the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and urged the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to ratify the treaties.

Norma Hotaling, executive director of the SAGE Project, explained that every day, "vulnerable and naive girls ages 12-17 are brutally and cunningly recruited by violent or smooth talking pimps from local high schools, streets and shopping malls and delivered to major cities all through the U.S. Poor and vulnerable Asian, South and Central American and Russian women and girls are smuggled, kidnapped, raped, tricked and coerced by traffickers and organized crime syndicates into the highly invisible and mobile sex trade that includes strip clubs, escort, massage parlors, brothels and street prostitution. These women and children make up the supply side of prostitution. The demand side of prostitution is comprised mostly of educated, middle and upper-class men." Expressing her support for the End Demand for Sex Trafficking Act, she stated, "As long as we point the finger away from ourselves, away from the institutions that blame and criminalize women and children for their own rape, sexual abuse, trafficking and slavery, away from the men who we normalize as 'Johns,' and as long as we disconnect adult prostitution and the exploitation of children and disconnect prostitution and trafficking in human beings for the purposes of rape and sex slavery; then we are to blame and we have assisted in creating well-funded transnational criminal networks – dollar by dollar."

Testifying on behalf of Polaris Project, Tina Frundt, herself a trafficking victim, urged Congress to pass the End Demand for Sex Trafficking Act, stating, "Undermining demand is key to cutting off the funding at its sources, preventing the trafficking networks from generating and laundering the profits. Increased funding for training and staff for financial investigation units is necessary to match the sophistication of the criminal networks with specialized capacity within law enforcement." She also encouraged the subcommittee to address sex trafficking within the United States and fund more services for American women who have been victims of trafficking.