

July 30, 2004, Vol. 10, Issue 11

Speaking Up is a project of the Family Violence Prevention Fund. Produced by PR Solutions, Inc., Washington, DC. Phone: 202/371-1999; Fax: 202/371-9142; E-mail: speakingup@prsolutionsdc.com.

U.S. Steps Up Efforts To Combat Sex Trafficking

In response to U.S. State Department's fourth annual *Trafficking in Persons* report, released in June, Congress is looking for new ways to stop trafficking and sexual slavery, and help victims.

On July 22, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing on the arranged marriages industry. Congress is considering the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act, to mandate the disclosure of a potential husband's criminal past and require U.S. immigration authorities to tell prospective brides coming into this country about domestic violence protections.

"Tragically, it is becoming apparent that there is a growing epidemic of domestic abuse among couples who meet via international marriage brokers," Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) said at the hearing. She said some 500 marriage broker organizations, many functioning on the Internet, sponsored 20,000 to 30,000 women who have come to the U.S. in the last five years. The industry is almost entirely unregulated, and often functions as a front for human traffickers and organized crime.

Trafficking in Person Report

Some 80 percent of the 600,000 to 800,000 people who are trafficked across international borders each year are women, and half are children – some as young as six years old. Millions more are trafficked within their own countries. Those are the conclusions of *Trafficking in Persons* report, which finds that many victims of trafficking live as 21st century slaves.

The report quantifies and qualifies the problem of international human trafficking, looking at the problem both across international borders and within victims' home countries. Some 14,500 to 17,500 people were trafficked in the U.S. last year.

"Numbers so large can be numbing. They freeze our imaginations," Secretary of State Colin

Powell said in releasing the report.

The report says poverty, weak social and economic structures, organized crime, discrimination, political instability, armed conflict and cultural traditions are among the causes of human trafficking. It notes that growing gender gaps in densely populated countries such as India and China – brought on largely by sex-selection abortions by couples who want sons – are creating a new source of demand for young brides and concubines.

World View

The report examines nations with 100 or more confirmed victims of trafficking – 140 countries around the world. That is an increase of 16 countries over last year. Part of the increase may be due to improved data collection, the report says.

It divides the nations into three tiers. Tier 1 countries have governments that comply fully with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000.

Tier 2 countries do not comply fully with the Act, but are making an effort to do so. This year's report offers a new Tier 2 Watch List, described by Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons Director John Miller as "weak Tier 2 countries that are in danger, in the coming year, of falling to Tier 3."

Tier 3 countries are not making significant efforts to comply with minimum standards. Ten nations were identified as the worst offenders this year – Bangladesh, Burma, Cuba, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Guyana, North Korea, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Venezuela.

Miller emphasizes that, "while Tier 3, under the law, brings with it the possibility of losses of certain kinds of U.S. aid, the purpose of this report is not sanctions. It is to get progress."

Solutions

Miller says that progress has been made, as governments are increasingly taking steps to help victims and jail traffickers. Twenty-four countries have instituted new comprehensive anti-trafficking laws in the last year.

Effective anti-trafficking strategies must target supply, demand and traffickers themselves, the report says. It recommends that local, state, national and regional strategies be coordinated, and advises drawing public attention to the problem in order to build awareness and strengthen support for remedies. It recommends ongoing statistical tracking of trafficking to illuminate the nature and magnitude of the problem.

Victims

In addition to analyzing the scope of the international modern-day slave trade, the 2004 State Department report profiles victims. "Katya" from the Czech Republic was forced into prostitution. Twelve-year-old "Natalia" from the Democratic Republic of the Congo was

recruited into the army, and then beaten and raped by other soldiers.

The Internet has helped fuel the sexual exploitation of children, the report says, as millions of young girls and boys are forced into the growing child sex tourism industry. The report cites Japanese tourists who travel to Thailand and Americans who travel to Mexico as examples of “situational abusers who take advantage of children sexually” once they are abroad.

In the U.S., the PROTECT Act makes it a crime for any person to enter the United States, or for any citizen to travel abroad for the purpose of sex tourism involving children. Sex tour operators and patrons can face up to 30 years in prison.

The comprehensive report is available online at www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004/. It includes detailed country narratives, along with the tier listings and international best practices.