

# **The Demand:**

## **The Driving Force of Sex Trafficking**

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“The Human Rights Challenge of Globalization in Asia-Pacific-U.S.: The Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children” Globalization Research Center, University of Hawaii at Manoa and the East-West Center, Hawaii Convention Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, November 13-15, 2002

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First, I'd like to thank Laura Lederer, Deputy Senior Advisor to the U.S. Secretary of State for her leadership in fighting the trafficking of women and children.

At this conference, you've heard a number of references to debates, conflicts, and people being contentious; well, I'm one of them. So, I might as well start off by being contentious. The previous speaker said that this the first time that “the demand” was being discussed or addressed in an international conference. That is not true. Just this morning, I had breakfast with a woman from the Philippines who opposed the exploitation of women by U.S. servicemen in the Philippines in the mid-1980s. Also, I've attended numerous conferences over the past 10 years that have discussed “the demand,” so let's put that bit of revisionist history to rest.

Also, originally, a man who is a suspected trafficker-in fact, he is on Interpol's watch list-was listed as a presenter at this conference. Another speaker-a woman, who was known to have been detained by police on suspicion of falsifying documents for trafficked women-was on the program. When some of us saw these suspected criminals passing themselves off as anti-trafficking activists, we decided to blow the whistle on them. Thankfully, they are no longer speakers or participants at this conference. In addition, a number of people in this room contacted the government of Bangladesh to them that a suspected trafficker was working as an Anti-Trafficking Advisor for the Ministry of Women and Children. I'm happy to tell you that Bangladesh has run him out of the country.

I make no apology for being contentious or for exposing wolves in sheep's clothing. I don't believe he should have been a speaker at this conference, although I know he as supporters here.

Women and children are trafficked for different purposes. There have been numerous calls for “conceptual clarity” at this conference, so today; my comments will focus only on trafficking for commercial sex acts or prostitution. I won’t lump prostitution with forms of labor.

Traffickers and pimps engage in trafficking to make money. The “commodities” and “services” that they buy, sell, abuse, and exploit are women and children. The trafficking of women and children is based on supply and demand between sending and receiving countries. Countries with legal or tolerated prostitution create the demand and are the receiving or destination countries, while countries where traffickers easily recruit women are the sending countries.

The demand is the driving force behind trafficking. The trafficking process begins when men and pimps create the demand for women and girls to be used for prostitution. Where the demand for prostitution is high, insufficient numbers of local women and girls can be recruited. In each locale, women and girls with certain physical attributes are in demand. The pimps place orders with traffickers for the numbers of women and girls they need.

There is no dignity in prostitution. Acts of prostitution are acts of misogyny, not respect or affection, and have nothing to do with love or intimacy. They are acts that are based on objectification and projection of racist, ethnic, and sexist stereotypes onto the woman or child. Women don’t emerge from prostitution into positions of power, respect or admiration. They are confined to powerlessness as individuals and to an underclass as a group.

Increasingly, the demand for women in prostitution is being normalized. In destination countries, strategies are devised to protect the sex industries that generate hundreds of millions of dollars per year for the state where prostitution is legal, or for organized crime groups and corrupt officials where the sex industry is illegal. The profits of these legal and illegal sex industries depend on normalizing the demand and maintaining the flow of foreign women.

The Netherlands has taken a lead role in normalizing the prostitution of women. In the last 30 years, prostitution has tripled in size and economic importance. Now it is a \$1 billion per year industry. The Netherlands legalized brothels and pimping in October 2000. According to one source there are 2,000 brothels and numerous escort services, using an estimated 30,000 women. Not enough local or EU women can be recruited; therefore, 70 percent of the women in prostitution in the Netherlands are from outside the EU. A high percentage of these women are trafficked women. According to one study, 79 percent of women in prostitution gave an indication that they were in prostitution due to some degree of force. Because insufficient numbers of EU women can be recruited, the Netherlands has indicated that it will create a legal apparatus to maintain the flow of women from sending countries to its brothels.

The legalization of brothels and pimping put the Netherlands in violation of United Nations Convention Against All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of which it is a signer. In its 2000 compliance report to the CEDAW committee, the government defended the legalization of prostitution and criticized CEDAW. The Netherlands’ report states “prostitution is in and of itself no problem and can’t be regarded as a form of violence against women.” The Netherlands criticized CEDAW for

regarding prostituted women as victims and added that the government of the Netherlands has now rejected that view. Further, the report states “exploitation of prostitution [pimping] is also not considered a problem by the government as long as no force is involved.” The Netherlands challenged CEDAW’s prohibition of the exploitation of prostitution by saying there was a need to distinguish between “good” and “bad” exploitation, claiming that the Convention is not clear which type of exploitation is prohibited.

With the Netherlands government defending “good exploitation,” it could then move on to how it was going to legally maintain the flow of foreign women to its brothels. In Kyiv, Ukraine, at a conference on trafficking in women, a representative of the Netherlands defended the demand for and exploitation of women in prostitution. He said, “The demand is already there. We can’t eradicate the demand. We will regulate it. Grant permits. Make them pay taxes.” To get around the lack of a local supply of women for the brothels, he explained that the flow of women from sending countries could be legalized: “Other countries may have women with working skills that will benefit the Netherlands. We could create special permits that will allow foreign nationals to engage in prostitution.”

The reasoning goes: If the state issues legal work permits to foreign women this would mean that ‘the market’ decided on the number of women that would be needed. This led to the suggestion from the Dutch Ministry of Justice to honor market demands and find a quota system, because the Dutch prostitution market demands a variety of “bodies.”

There are also individuals, groups, and funding agencies in the United States that are supporting the shift to normalizing the demand. For example, a set of policy recommendations that were issued from a policy forum convened by a large academic NGO at the U.S. State Department in August 2000 recommended that prostitution be redefined as form of labor, and migration laws changed to allow a flow of women for prostitution. Under the guise ending the trafficking of women the demand for women in destination countries was legitimized: “Migrating sex workers are simply responding to a demand for their labor.” The recommendations also said, that “Sex work” is empowering for women because it enables them to migrate to other countries giving them “greater economic independency and autonomy from men.” Although the academic NGO stated that the views of its invited participants didn’t necessarily reflect its position, after it received several million dollars in funding from the U.S. Department of State, the Department of Labor, and USAID, that seems to be precisely the views it started to promote during the past year.

As has been noted, the anti-trafficking movement is becoming increasingly polarized. The debate is over demand-will the demand be legitimized and accommodated or will the demand be confronted and stopped. Those are the points of contention, and where policy decisions must be made. And the decisions on what to do about the demand will determine the success in countering the trafficking of women. Whether to legitimize or stop the demand are two different choices. They are not reconcilable end points. I’m not sure if people understand this, but there is no common ground between them. Either the demand is accepted, normalized, even legalized, or it is rejected, confronted, and stopped. The lives of millions of women and children around the world depend on the choice we make.

I believe from what I heard Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services Claude Allen say yesterday, that there will be a policy soon that opposes trafficking and prostitution. I hope that policy will prevent U.S. funds from being used to normalize the demand for prostitution in the future. I believe this is the real cause of this sudden hysteria and “concern” about the debates. I think what we are hearing is fear that we are closing in on the demand. I believe we have been insulted by these lectures, as if we are children squabbling over candy. In fact, what we are fighting about is the well being and lives of millions of women and children around the world. I believe their lives, dignity, and health are well worth the fight.

I believe we need to make the men and pimps who are creating the demand for women and children visible, and label them with the appropriate names. Stop covering up for them by calling them by respectable names, like “clients” and “customers,” as if they are engaged in respectable behavior.

May I remind you that in the United States, the demand is already criminalized (except in a couple of counties in Nevada). It is illegal for men to solicit women and children for prostitution. It is illegal to pimp women and children. It is illegal to run a brothel. It is illegal to transport women and girls across state lines for purposes of prostitution. It is illegal to traffic women and children into the U.S. for commercial sex acts. We need to demand that these laws be enforced.

I want to give you a local example. This information was shared with me by Equality NOW. On Pia Street, here in Honolulu, a man runs a sex tour agency. He organizes prostitution tours to Thailand from a web site called Video Travel. Equality NOW has done an analysis and listed all the laws that this man is violating, including promoting prostitution. I gave this information to Deputy Chief Lau of the Honolulu Police Department on the first day of the conference. I believe in really going after the criminals and perpetrators, not just talking about them, or saying they really aren't so bad.

I want to briefly mention something about the supply. The victims of sex trafficking and their circumstances are increasingly described, characterized, and analyzed. When much of the focus is on the supply, the result is increasing scrutiny of the women's lives, motivations, and circumstances, as if they are responsible for the crimes committed against them. Although it is important to understand the supply side of trafficking, it can inadvertently become a form of victim blaming. The people responsible for the global sex trade are the perpetrators and they are the ones the must be held accountable.

It takes vision, political will, and courage to oppose the demand. You have to be able to imagine the world you want for women and children. Then you start working toward your vision, with each step taking you little closer. Over 35 years ago, women came together and launched the women's liberation movement for women's freedom and rights. The movement has achieved a lot for most of us, but there are millions of women and girls who are in slavery, being abused and exploited every day of their lives. I believe that women and children everywhere, not just those from some countries or socioeconomic levels, are entitled to basic human rights, which includes lives with dignity. Their bodies and emotions must belong to them alone. They cannot be turned into commodities to be bought and sold. I believe that the abolition of trafficking and the global sex trade is the only goal consistent with advancement of women's rights and in

agreement with universal human rights standards. Earlier, we were warned about too much “emotionalism”; was that too emotional? People’s passionate caring about others drives all human rights movements.

Trafficking in women and children is a global human rights crisis. I believe this is the human rights struggle of our times. I believe we must set our goals high, and then have the political will and courage to fight to attain them.