

Testimony of
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the horrific practice of human trafficking and slavery. It is a great encouragement to see this important issue prioritized by this committee.

My name is Joseph Mettimano and I serve as the Child Protection Policy Advisor for World Vision.

World Vision is a 54-year-old international Christian humanitarian organization with programs in 100 countries served by 20,000 staff worldwide. World Vision is a child-focused organization, and as such, is a witness to the impact of child trafficking and sexual exploitation, both here in the United States and in many countries abroad. My remarks will focus on the impact of trafficking and sex slavery on the most vulnerable victims, children.

The practice of human trafficking is as old as slavery itself. Each year, an estimated one million people, predominately women and children, are trafficked from one country to another for the purpose servitude in the commercial sex trade, forced labor or domestic service. It is a problem impacting nearly every country on the planet, including the United States.

Traffickers, pimps and brothel owners target vulnerable children, particularly those living in poverty. Each year millions of children fall victim to some form of sexual abuse or exploitation. Many of these children are abducted, forced or coerced into sexual slavery by strangers. Others are either sold into prostitution to pay off family debts or are forcefully recruited on the streets where many runaways are trying to escape abuse in the home. Frequently children are "trafficked" out of one country and into another where they are beaten and forced to work in brothels. Driven by supply and demand, these abhorrent practices comprise a multi-billion dollar international business.

The impact on children is catastrophic: long-lasting physical and psychological trauma, disease (including HIV/AIDS), violence/abuse, drug addiction, unwanted pregnancy, malnutrition, social ostracism, poverty and, in many cases, death.

Outside of the United States, many factors have contributed to the increase in commercial sexual exploitation of children, including:

- ? Poverty and unemployment
- ? Inadequate or non enforced laws

- ? Expansion of organized crime
- ? Government/law enforcement corruption
- ? Lack of political will to end the practice
- ? Low status of girls in many countries
- ? Moral decay
- ? Availability of pornography and the promotion of sex tours on the internet
- ? Lack of education

Recent growth in the number of prostituted children also can be traced to the spread of HIV/AIDS. The spread of HIV/AIDS has encouraged predominately local men in developing countries to seek young children for sex with the erroneous belief that children are less likely to carry the disease.

Statistics suggest that the highest concentrations of prostituted children are found in Asia and Latin America. For example, it is estimated that one-third of the prostitutes in Cambodia are children. In Eastern Europe, Russia, Poland, Romania, Hungary and the Czech Republic have experienced an increase in child prostitution, as well. World Vision has learned through its work in many of these countries that the average age of a child exploited in the commercial sex trade is 14 years, but some are as young as five years old. Of these children, many have acquired sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), such as HIV/AIDS.

The practice of child sex tourism, wherein men from wealthy countries travel to have sex with children predominately in poor countries, is especially on the rise in countries in Asia and Latin America. This has resulted in a greater supply of child victims to meet the increased demand. A survey conducted in December 2001 by World Vision and the Cambodian Government indicates that "Westerners" (including Americans) account for about 38 percent of all child sex offenders in three principle destinations for tourists in Cambodia. In Latin American countries such as Costa Rica, estimates are as high as 80%. ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking of Children) estimates that 25 percent of sex tourists worldwide are U.S. citizens.

Mr. Chairman, these statistics, while sobering, do not come close to fully revealing the depth of this scourge, nor in telling the story of the victims. I'm reminded of a 13-year-old Cambodian girl who I met in Phnom Penh about a year ago. She was sold to a brothel owner because her father desperately needed medical care that her impoverished family could not afford. Her parents were faced with the nightmare decision to sell their child for the money to pay for the medical treatment. Closer to home, in 2001, I met a 19-year-old women from the Chicago area who had

been prostituted since she was fifteen years old. She was sexually abused at home by her stepfather, which caused her to run away. She met a man at a bus station who offered her food and shelter, but she later was raped, beaten and forced into prostitution. These stories, while shocking, are not unusual.

A 1996 survey of World Vision national offices revealed that 70 percent of our offices overseas were dealing with some form of exploitation of local children. Through World Vision's vast network, we have been involved in programming aimed at preventing children from being drawn into the sex trade and helping those already victimized. Our work has focused on:

- ? prevention programs such as skills training designed to prevent children from being sold or drawn into the sex trade, and community awareness-raising programs;
- ? residential treatment facilities to provide exploited children with on-going medical care, counseling, skill training and a safe place to live;
- ? training of local law enforcement officials to appropriately assist victims, advocacy with ministries of tourism to address sex tourism and encouraging governments to create and enforce effective child protection laws;
- ? and, most recently, a program that is deterring Americans from participating in child sex tourism and assisting U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in their work by helping to identify child sex tourists from the United States and providing key information that can be used in their prosecution.

Fortunately, organizations like World Vision are no longer fighting this problem alone. In recent years, the United States Congress has made several important advancements in combating international trafficking and slavery. The Mann Act of 1910, which banned the transportation of prostitutes beyond state lines, provides the underpinnings of child sexual exploitation law in the United States. The Act was strengthened in 1994 with the passage of the Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Act (passed as part of the 1994 "Crime Bill") and most recently by the passage of The Protect Act of 2003, which imposes a fine and prison sentence of up to thirty years for any U.S. citizen who is convicted of participating in, or attempting to participate in, child sex tourism.

One of the most comprehensive pieces of trafficking legislation passed by Congress is the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. This important law contains several strong provisions to both combat trafficking and assist victims, including:

- ? funding to support anti-trafficking enforcement and victim assistance programs abroad;
- ? availability of a non-immigrant visa ("T" visa) and protection from criminalization for trafficking victims in the United States;
- ? directs the Secretary of State to issue an annual report on the status of international trafficking, and establishes an interagency task force on trafficking;
- ? established the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons at the State Department;
- ? doubles the current penalties for convicted traffickers (up to life imprisonment for worst offenses);
- ? directs the President to deny non-humanitarian aid to countries that tolerate trafficking.

All of these measures have not only made advancements in combating international trafficking and slavery, but have set a leadership example for the rest of the world in addressing these issues.

In recent years, much attention has rightly been drawn to the plight of trafficking and sexual exploitation victims outside of the United States. However, this problem is not limited to poor countries, nor is it limited to perpetrations by foreign criminals. The problem is very real in the United States, and, notably, the exploitation that happens outside of the United States is made worse through the participation of U.S. citizens in sex tourism.

Research conducted by experts such as Dr. Melissa Farley of Prostitution Research and Education, and Dr. Richard Estes of the University of Pennsylvania have provided the American public with a snapshot of the commercial sex trade in the United States. Dr. Estes' research revealed that between 244,000 and 325,000 American children are at risk of being victimized by commercial sexual exploitation each year. Further, Dr. Farley's interviews with 130 people working as prostitutes in the San Francisco area revealed that:

- 83% have been threatened with a weapon
- 82% have been physically assaulted
- 68% have been raped (59% of these have been raped four or more times)
- 84% reported past or current homelessness
- 49% reported that pornography was made of them in prostitution
- 75% have a drug abuse problem
- 50% now have a physical health problem
- 88% want to leave prostitution
- 57% were sexually abused as children

All too often, these women and children are exploited as a result of difficult circumstances, previous abuse, homelessness and other vulnerabilities. Pimps and brothel owners prey on people such as these in order to fulfill the demand of their customers, known as "Johns." The use of the internet has only exacerbated the problem by providing a forum for pornography, prostitution on demand and chat boards. Markedly, the U.S. Department of State estimates that between 14,500-17,500 women and children are trafficked into the United States annually for service in the sex trade, as well.

The Department of State, the Department of Justice and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have made progress in recent years to combat sex crimes against children. For example, in the past year, more than 3,000 sex offenders and predators have been arrested in the U.S. due to the great work of Operation Predator, an ICE initiative that just completed its first year in operation. The work of these agencies, along with local police, nongovernmental organizations and many other organizations should be praised for their significant work.

The opportunity for additional measures to combat trafficking and slavery are abundant. In the United States, a greater emphasis on preventing women and children from being vulnerable to the sex trade, along with increased measures to identify and prosecute the abusers themselves (including pimps, brothel owners and "Johns") is greatly needed. State and local police need to be better equipped to address these issues. Innovative programs, such as "John Schools" and amnesty/support programs for victims who testify against pimps are needed, as well. Cracking down on international child sex tourism through better information sharing among law enforcement agencies is imperative. In general, we need to have an increased emphasis on the demand-side of this problem.

Finally, your leadership on this issue is greatly needed. As you know, a number of nongovernmental organizations, including citizen groups, faith-based groups, feminist groups and human rights organizations have worked with the Congress in the past on historic measures such as the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, The Sudan Peace Act, the International Religious Freedom Act and the Prison Rape Elimination Act. Organizations and individuals from across the political spectrum have found common ground on these issues - - and for good reason - - these issues strike at the core of human decency.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership on this important issue. I would be glad to answer any questions.