

**The Interfaith Summer Institute for Justice, Peace and Social Movements
Simon Fraser University**

**Human Dignity and 2010 Olympics:
Challenging Trafficking for the Sexual Exploitation of Women
28 June 2008**

**Panel 1: Valuing Human Dignity: Challenging Trafficking of Women
What's Happening on the Ground: Now and Tomorrow**

Introductory remark

As outlined in the introduction, it is from the perspectives of both the national work on counter-trafficking and our work at the UN that I address today's topic of *Valuing Human Dignity: Challenging Trafficking of Women: What's Happening on the Ground: Now and Tomorrow*

Engagement in the issue of human trafficking

Two stories illustrate the beginnings of my engagement in advocacy against human trafficking.

Australia, has until very recently, had a punitive immigration system. In late 2000, when visiting the detention centre in Melbourne where undocumented and 'illegal' immigrants and refugees are housed in prison-like conditions, I met 3 young Thai women. A Chinese detainee whom we had been regularly visiting had gained their confidence and through him we learned their story. Tui, Phan and Srinak had been trafficked to Australia by a Thai woman and her Australian husband on the promise of work as hostesses in restaurants. We discovered that Tui had worked in a massage parlour and was over 18 at the time of coming to Australia, but Phan and Srinak had been under-age and had come from rural villages. Their story was the common one of deception, confiscation of passports, brutal 'breaking in' practices and extensive exploitation in both legal and illegal brothels in Sydney and Melbourne. They had been subject to debt bondage of \$35000 which at that time took 600-700 sexual encounters to pay off. The cruel hoax was that the traffickers in our country have a practice of notifying the immigration department that there are 'illegals' in a brothel when the debt bondage has been almost served and they are picked up in a raid. Although we had begun the process of advocating for Tui, Phan and Srinak they were deported – to an unknown future and maybe to being re-trafficked.

The second story is of young Filipina woman whom I'll call Sarah:

Sarah came from a poor family in the Batangas region. At 14 she went to work for a relative as a housemaid and subsequently was forced into prostitution. In 2000, when she was 16 she was sold by her 'uncle' as a mail-order bride to an unknown Australian. She was given travel papers and came to Brisbane where she experienced brutal domestic violence from her 'husband' (no legal marriage had taken place) and where she was used as a prostitute by his friends and acquaintances. When she fought back she was informed she 'owed' the 'husband' money for her air-travel and keep and had to pay. She ran away and sought help from another Filipina woman.

However her 'husband' reported her to the Department of Immigration and she was picked up in a raid on the suburban house where she had found refuge. After several days of questioning in a Brisbane jail, Sarah was taken to Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney where she was held for five months and was subsequently deported to the Philippines. Later, I met Sarah in the Philippines where she was very determined to assist other young women who have been deceived and trafficked into the sex industry.

As shocking as stories like these are, they are not new to many of you.

What they illustrate are some of the underlying issues that must be addressed if the scourge of human trafficking is to be stopped:

- the vulnerability of women living in poverty,
- inequality in male-female power relations, which often leads to the social acceptance of the right of the male to “demand” sex
- the objectifying of women and the exploitation of children
- the socially accepted view that women and girls are commodities
- the cultural acceptance of violence against women
- the outright abuse of the human rights of women and children.

Unfortunately these are often coupled with further abuse by legal and immigration systems that criminalize the women and give impunity to the exploiters and traffickers.

Not the way forward

Like many westernized countries, Australia was in denial about the extent of human trafficking occurring in our country. The Government was forced to face the trafficking of women into sexual exploitation when a coronial inquest in 2003 investigating the death of a young Thai woman found both the government and its out-sourced detention facility operators to be both negligent and culpable. Shortly after, a snapshot of the trafficking of persons into Australia was then provided by some research conducted by Project Respect, at that time the only NGO trying to address trafficking. This research found that at any one time there could be up to 1000 women, some under-age, trafficked into sexual slavery in the legal and illegal brothels in Australia. Whilst some were cases of trafficking into domestic servitude and into the construction and hospitality industries, 96% were trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

Why is this happening? One of the major reasons, and one that is often ignored, is because many men see sex as their right- on demand.

Australia is not unique in both its unenthusiastic admission of the problem of trafficking for sexual servitude and its even more reluctant recognition that there is a connection between this demand, the prevalence of prostitution and the phenomenon of trafficking for sexual exploitation. I believe that other countries debating whether or not to legalize prostitution could learn from what happens in my State of Victoria, and from Australia in general, where prostitution is legalized in 5 states and one territory. In Victoria legalization has spawned three times more illegal than legal brothels; there is minimal policing and the government accrues substantial tax revenue. Demand has risen and the only way the 'market' can be filled is by trafficking in women

and girls and moving them from place to place. “Customers” want more “exotic”, younger and cheaper women. (Mary Sullivan, “Making Sex Work: A Failed Experiment with Legalised Prostitution” 2004) Work by Donna Hughes and Melissa Farley, and others, would support the connection between demand, prostitution and trafficking in other parts of the world.

Collaborative action

The concern amongst health, education and social service providers, both faith-based and not, with the rising incidence of trafficking of women and children into Australia coincided with the commitment of women religious worldwide to unite in addressing the issue of human trafficking. In 2006 Australian Catholic Religious Against Human Trafficking took active steps to confront the government and to begin establishing collaborative work between advocates, civil society and the government. I will take this up later as one example of a way forward in countering this pernicious trade of human beings.

UNANIMA International

As many of you are aware there are numerous groups nationally and internationally working to stop human trafficking. Whilst awareness-raising about human trafficking as modern-day slavery has been in the media nationally and internationally for some time, there has been limited attention, and I venture to say some reluctance, to address the **demand** that drives the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation.

UNANIMA International decided to specifically tackle the hard question of *demand*. Amongst our members across the world we have members in schools, health facilities, HIV/AIDS clinics, shelters, legal advocates, social workers, workers in refugee camps, etc., and we have members who know vulnerable and trafficked women and children. We have a long tradition of being social service providers and of meeting unmet needs in society. We continue these works, but no amount of shelters or repatriation programs will stop the problem. In fact, at a recent meeting with those working against trafficking in Rome, two Nigerian religious who work closely with women who are either vulnerable to being trafficked or who have been repatriated said: “We have been working at trying to prevent trafficking by education of those who are vulnerable and their families for many years now and the problem only gets bigger. We are convinced that we must work against demand to have any success.”

The buying and selling of women and girls for sex will only be stopped if we address the issue of demand. If no one will pay for sex and there is no demand, those who traffic will make no profit and they will stop trafficking. It’s that simple.

We see one way of ‘*Valuing Human Dignity and Challenging the Trafficking of Women*’ is being addressed by the UNANIMA International campaign to “Stop the Demand for Trafficking in Women and Children” which we launched in March this year. Motivated by the fundamental ethical imperative that the human rights of other human beings must be upheld and protected, and by the tenets of Catholic Social Teaching which gives primacy to human dignity, we see this campaign as one way of confronting the issue.

UNANIMA International has an ambitious vision. We believe:

- Affirming the dignity of all human beings, especially women and children, who are the most vulnerable, will help *stop the demand*
- Eliminating factors that drive global trafficking and prostitution and are linked with organised crime, particularly with the illicit use of the internet, will help *stop the demand*
- Removing the terms ‘industry’, ‘client’, ‘tourism’ and ‘work’, which mask and trivialise the dehumanising reality that women and children suffer from pimps, profiteers and users, will help *stop the demand*
- Publicising comprehensive campaigns linking demand with global trafficking, gender inequality, lack of decent work, and poverty are essential to eliminating sexual exploitation and will help *stop the demand*
- Implementing effective laws that criminalise the buyers of sex and seize the assets of profiteers will help *stop the demand*.

The first phase of the campaign in educating our members, co-workers and key colleagues is underway. Some actions have already taken place: many have used our postcard campaign to lobby for changes in State legislation or for the re-authorisation of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. We have suggested that the UN declare an international day to mark the global fight against human trafficking. The aims of this first phase are to raise the awareness and develop actions which can increase awareness in their milieu and also lead to improved laws or better implementation of existing laws.

The second phase will be the development and training for an education campaign that targets young people, focuses on gender equality, re-socialising of males and females and uses Web technologies for social networking such as Facebook, LinkedIn; del.icio.us, YouTube and cartoon presentations which appeal to a younger audience than the first phase of the campaign.

Using international mechanisms to stop human trafficking

UNANIMA International also endeavours to bring about structural change by educating about the international protocols that apply to human trafficking, using these protocols in advocacy and in bringing the voice of civil society to the work at the United Nations.

Many of you would be familiar with

- 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others
- 2000 Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Organized Crime
- Child Rights Convention
- Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- The Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and associated protocols which was adopted by the United Nations in 2002. Known as the Palermo Protocol, Article 3 of the Trafficking protocol sets out an internationally accepted definition of human trafficking.

These protocols and mechanisms can be used in advocating with governments, in developing written and oral interventions that draw attention to the problem of human trafficking and keep it on the agenda. There is nothing more powerful than to hear the voice of women and children who have been exploited by traffickers. UNANIMA International has used sessions of the UN to bring women and their stories to give a human face to the negotiations. In the last three years, UNANIMA has brought to UN sessions survivors of human trafficking from the Philippines, Togo and Haiti. Last year, and a young Canadian aboriginal, who herself escaped being trafficked but had a close friend who was trafficked, spoke at the ‘World Fit for Children’.

I would like to illustrate the possibilities of using these UN instruments to bring about change at the national level. In January 2006 the Australian Catholic Religious Against Human Trafficking, the Anti-Slavery Project and the Women and Reform of Migration group presented a Shadow Report to CEDAW. Key recommendations centred on legislative reform of the visa framework that is applied to trafficked persons, review and resourcing of the victim support package and an expansion of the community education campaign. Six months after CEDAW we engaged in a 4-day lobbying visit to Canberra and met with politicians on both sides of politics to discuss the report of the CEDAW experts to the Government and to advocate for its implementation. This has established a collaborative relationship and has resulted in significant changes to the Victim Support package and to the visa framework and to funding of two safe houses for trafficked women which are conducted by two of our NGO partners.

In a similar vein, I know that sustained lobbying in states in the US has resulted in legislation criminalising human trafficking, the most comprehensive of which seems to be the New York law that goes further than many of the UN conventions and protocols.

One way forward is certainly to get national and state/provincial laws established, and enforced, that protect victims of trafficking and prosecute and punish the perpetrators.

Other Ways forward

There are some ordinary ways to change what is happening:

- Use accurate language that does not mask the reality of what is occurring when women are trafficked into sexual exploitation eg. “perpetrator” or “exploiter” for those who buy sex acts, rather than “clients” or “buyers”; “women exploited in prostitution rather than “sex workers”.
- Make the links between pornography and demand and trafficking and initiate or support campaigns to eliminate pornography and the buying of sex on the internet, or to campaign against sex tourism
- Promote the passage of anti-trafficking laws that follow the Swedish model of punishing those who buy sex.
- Promote the development and implementation of education programs like ‘First Time’ video project and young men’s camps (conducted by CATW-AP) and the First Offenders Prostitution Program in San Francisco etc

Basically we need to change the social culture that makes demand acceptable ...to Stop the Demand for the Trafficking in Women and Children.

Summing up

To return to my opening stories, Tui, Phan, Srinak and Sarah are survivors of unspeakable violence. They, and the millions of women like them, must not be subjected to the male dominance and gender inequality that pervades our world and leads to exploitation. The sexual objectification of any female and the cultural violence that is accepted in some cultures, and promoted by pornography, must be stopped. No law should enshrine the “right” of men to buy women and girls for sexual gratification.

I invite you to join UNANIMA International in campaigning to “Stop the Demand for Trafficking in Women and Children”.

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UNANIMA International