

*Linda Smith (U.S. Congress 1994-98)*

*Founder and President, Shared Hope International*

*October 21, 2009*

*House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight*

Honorable Committee Chairman Berman and Subcommittee Chairman Delahunt, Ranking Member Rohrabacher, and distinguished members of the Committee and Subcommittee, it is an honor to testify before you today on the matter of international violence against women.

Shared Hope International has been working to prevent, rescue and restore women and children in crisis, particularly the crisis of sex trafficking and its devastating effects. This work began in 1998 when I was called by a constituent to witness the enslavement of women and girls in brothels in Mumbai, India. Sex trafficking and the sexual slavery in which these women and girls of Mumbai are held is an agony suffered by millions of others around the world and represents an extreme form of international violence against women.

After witnessing the sex trafficking in Mumbai, I was compelled to organize Shared Hope International to provide a response to their desperate circumstances. Eleven years later, Shared Hope International has provided the resources and assistance to found seven holistic Villages of Hope, providing a substitute family and home to the victims of sex trafficking in India, Nepal, Fiji, Jamaica, the Netherlands, South Africa and the Dominican Republic. Currently, five of the seven Villages of Hope continue this critical restoration work abroad. These safe homes include the Women's Investment Network (WIN) which brings training and education to the women living in the Villages of Hope and other women living on the margins of their communities. Once defiled, many women no longer have a home to return to and become permanent members of the Village of Hope families.

The threat of physical violence through the commercial sexual exploitation of these women is very great. Just as dangerous are the health risks to the women that are a direct result of their sexual exploitation. HIV/AIDS is epidemic in the survivor community and in Shared Hope International's model of long-term restoration the cost of medical treatment and nutrition is an ever-increasing budget burden. Less measurable but equally harmful are the psychological harms. Sex trafficking and sex slavery victims suffer various forms of trauma designed to bond them to their trafficker through a conditioning process - a real, medical condition that takes extensive therapy to address. This trauma bonding keeps them in slavery even in a free world.

We've found common forces throughout the world destroying the lives of these children, like Renu in Nepal. Renu spent four years in sexual slavery in India, a country who has passed extensive trafficking laws making the buying and selling of trafficking victims a crime. Her story shows that even though India has a law against sex slavery that it did not in any way hinder her sale each and every day of the four years she was captive. Why? Because there is an active local sex market with a demand for young girls by the local men. This cultural tolerance towards men buying sex has created a market that puts young Indian and Nepalese girls in constant danger of kidnap and sexual violence as traffickers shop to meet the demand for more product.

*It was my foster brother who took me when I was just 14, drugged me with some juice, and sold me into prostitution. I woke up far from home and found I had been bought by a man who also owned other girls. I was so frightened and confused, I was kept in a locked room and I could do nothing of my own will. Though my spirit had died, I remained alive in that place for 4 years. I remained alive though I wanted nothing more than to die and I tried to take my life several times.*

*Girls in the brothel suffer terribly. Many of us were locked in dungeons in utter darkness, unable to tell if it is day or night, unable to talk to anyone at all, our only contact--the men that use us. I was lucky because my brothel owner let us out on occasion after the point where she knew we could no longer have the will to run away.*

*But one day I took the little money I had hidden and I did run away—I fled to the train station and started a 4 day journey to my home, Nepal. All during the long trip I dreamed and hoped my family would accept me but it was not to be. In the Hindu culture, if a girl is out for even one night the village assumes the worst and will not accept her back. I was shunned and rejected, and alone.*

*Then I remembered I had a slip of paper with a phone number slipped to me by a Nepali Christian missionary who had visited me in the brothel. I called and was so happy to find out that she was now the housemother for a new home that Shared Hope had just opened with the Believers' Fellowship in my own country of Nepal! They made a home for me and accepted me and became my new family. As I began to heal with God's help and the love of His people, I was able to help other girls returning to Nepal from the brothels of Bombay. Eventually I moved to the Village of Hope outside of Bombay in order to work with Teen Challenge to minister to the women and girls coming out of where I had been held captive. Of my friends in the brothel there when I fled, I alone remained alive, and I know God has spared me for His purpose.*

*I work as a full-time senior staff among rescued trafficked victims. I teach the girls Hindi, math, general science, and also the Teen Challenge manual. I am very happy now and desire to become a channel of blessing to many people.*

This painful story varies only slightly from the core elements of trafficking in other countries, including the United States. Tonya's story demonstrates this.

*I grew up without being accountable to anyone. I never knew my father, and my mom was an alcoholic; she was around, but not there...all I know, I have learned from my own experiences. I wish there had been an adult in my life to just teach me what is right and tell me what to watch out for, or what could happen to me. I just didn't know. When I was 12 years old, a guy I thought was just a "dope boy" kept following me in his car when I walked to school. He was older and real cool, and he said I was really cute. He paid a lot of attention to me and eventually I got in the car with him. For a while we were girlfriend and boyfriend; we would go everywhere together. It didn't take long before I experienced the real treatment—being beaten, stomped on, manipulated and sold all day every day.*

*When I think about how it must have looked to people, a baby-looking girl like me with an older "boyfriend", it makes me wonder why nobody was ever there to stop it, or even ask any*

questions at all. I think in our society there is nobody that even wants to stop it. It's just normal. Everything is about sex everywhere you look in our culture, and sex with little girls is just another part of the picture. That's the way it seemed to me when I was 12, and when I realized that my boyfriend was a pimp, I thought, well, I guess that's just the way it is and I did what he told me. I thought I was making the choice, and that was pretty much what I would have to do to get along in life. Nobody ever told me--I didn't understand--what a choice really was.

People have asked me how I could have done what I did—sell my body on the street, in cars, in trucks, anywhere and everywhere and then deliver every last dollar to my pimp. Looking back on it from my vantage point today, I can't answer that question...I'm amazed myself, that I was so under the control of that man. He was the only person in my life that I felt connected to and I even felt like he was my only protection; therefore, I would have done anything to stay with him. The price was for me to sell the only thing I had, my body. He gave me a different name, a street name...it was Cookie. That was fine with me because Tonya would never do the things Cookie did; I was a different person when I was tricking.

Sometimes the john would tell me they knew I was young and they wanted to help me get out; I always took it as a joke because they would go ahead and use me anyway. They acted like their pity or their money helped me. They never did anything to help me, and I stopped hoping that anyone ever would.

It's a very strange world when you are in it. In a really screwed up way, I had a family. It was a family of "wife in laws" that fought each other out of jealousy and competition for our pimp's attention. We were only allowed to talk to each other, never anyone outside the family. I was arrested 17 different times in all kinds of cities and every time I went to detention, they thought all they had to do is change where I was. So I ended up in group homes where people had serious drug and mental problems, but not my kind of problem...there was nothing to help me deal with the trauma of what happened to me. I wanted nothing to do with those places. Being with the "family" was at least something I was used to, so I ran away and back to my pimp every time. Each time I was transferred from out of state back to Ohio, it was in handcuffs and leg shackles and I was surrounded by policemen that I felt were my enemies. Despite my age, I spent 8 months in prison when my pimp caught a federal case. Yes, **I'm the one** that went to prison. I could never trust anyone. Sitting in a facility with criminals didn't help; it only made me more bitter.

What did help was to finally meet someone who had walked in my shoes and survived. This lady was real, not just in what she said, but because she had been where I was; I had a torn-soul to torn-soul relationship with her. So many others are out for the publicity, but girls like me can tell when someone is sincere, understands what it is like to be a slave, and really wants to help. I have a new life now, and I am going to study to become a doctor. The day that changed my life, I was walking to school. I was going to a special program because I was smart. A lot has happened to me and I'm wiser now, but I'm going to go back and pick up with that smart girl, and move ahead.

The severity of trauma bonding keeps them bound in these situations, but cultural and official inability to see them as victims and the continuing use of terminology such as "child prostitutes"

prevents entire cultures from perceiving the victimization, failing to prioritize the pursuit of demand reduction as a solution to this particular form of violence against women.

In 2005, Shared Hope International received funding through the U.S. Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons to undertake a comparative examination of the sex trafficking and sex tourism markets with an eye toward identifying demand reduction strategies in four diverse countries: Japan, Jamaica, the Netherlands, and the United States. What we found was that demand is driving the markets and thriving due to the culture of tolerance that exists globally for the commercial sexual exploitation of women and girls. Without a buyer of commercial sex from a trafficking victim, there would not be a market. Thus the report and accompanying awareness documentary was titled *DEMAND*. (See [www.sharedhope.org/what/enddemand3](http://www.sharedhope.org/what/enddemand3)). This demand is the single greatest reason that violence against women will not cease in any culture.

An equally disturbing finding related to the look into America. Expecting to find large numbers of foreign national women trafficked to the United States for commercial sexual exploitation we were stunned to discover much larger numbers of U.S. citizen and lawful permanent resident minors being exploited through the commercial sex industry. American girls of all colors and ages were found stripping and being prostituted in the VIP rooms of gentleman's clubs, prostituted through escort agencies and Internet erotic websites, and controlled by pimps in the streets of Atlanta, Las Vegas and the Washington, DC-Baltimore corridor. Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) these girls are trafficking victims and anyone who has worked to restore their bodies, minds and souls from the trauma they have suffered can tell you they are victims of extreme forms of violence.

This discovery led to a research project funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance to investigate the scope of this domestic minor sex trafficking problem and to determine what services were or were not being provided to rescue and restore the victims. Eleven locations were researched over three years and individual assessment reports issued for each. In all cases, we found American minor children arrested and/or detained for prostitution or prostitution-related offenses rather than treated for the violence inflicted upon them. Survivors tell of their trafficker's extreme swings from love to violence which works to create the trauma bond that holds them prisoner. In all locations, a tolerance for the commercial sex industry and the demand for younger victims were driving the recruitment and trafficking of girls.

At the conclusion of the research project, Shared Hope International had accumulated information that strongly suggested a national crisis: our youth are at risk for extreme violence through prostitution. Furthermore, the large majority of adult trafficked women reported that they were trafficked originally when they were under 18 years old. Violence against women in any culture, nation, or community includes violence against girl children. This violence very often carries over into adult women's lives. After years of providing protection for the girls and women in other countries, Shared Hope International decided to take action here in the United States. We are advocates for prevention of and protection from this egregious form of violence against female children.

The United States is a recognized leader in the anti-trafficking battle and has signed and ratified the UN Protocol against human trafficking which provides that persons under 18 years of age who are used to perform commercial sex acts are victims of sex trafficking. This international standard is reiterated in the American anti-trafficking law, the TVPA 2000. The U.S. Department of State authors the *Trafficking in Persons Report* each year which measures the efforts of other countries in combating human trafficking in their respective countries. This evaluation has grown to include internal trafficking; countries that have not taken a firm position on preventing internal trafficking have been affected in the evaluation as a result. Also, Congress mandated an annual report issue from the Attorney General detailing human trafficking in the U.S and efforts under the U.S. Government to combat it. Several federal agencies also participated in the U.S. Mid-term Review for the Third World Congress Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in 2006 which generated a report demonstrating efforts are being taken but much more must be initiated to fight this problem effectively. (See [www.sharedhope.org/csecmtrusa/csec.asp](http://www.sharedhope.org/csecmtrusa/csec.asp)). With the knowledge that thousands of American minors are prostituted in the commercial sex industry, we must ask “How would the United States fare in such an evaluation?”

Shared Hope International compiled the eleven reports into *The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America's Prostituted Children*. The report reveals the startling facts that at least 100,000 children are used in prostitution every year in the United States and the average age of entry into prostitution is 13 years old. We learned through our research that in Las Vegas, 226 juveniles came before the Juvenile Court judge in just 20 months; in Miami, 21 girls were prosecuted for prostitution in one year; and in Dallas, 165 juveniles were detained on prostitution and related charges in 2007. These are just the children that were discovered and the cases documented – the real numbers are certainly much larger. In nearly every case the child rather than the buyer is arrested. The minor, though defined by the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) as a victim, is arrested for the crime committed against her. This arrest and treatment of the victim as a criminal is a secondary violence committed against her, compounding the trauma of the sexual violence she has already endured at the hands of the trafficker and the multitude of buyers who have used her.

One stunning example is found in the following declaration of arrest completed by a police officer in 2006. The declaration states:

*“After watching the truck slow down and the female approach the truck, then later finding the truck on a side street with the female in the truck, through my training and experience I know this is a common practice for prostitution related crimes. We then approached the vehicle and came on a juvenile (DOB 3-19-1994) and male (DOB 11-4-1959) involved in a sex act. Due to the above circumstances, the stated agreement for \$40 for a hand job, observation that he had \$45 in U.S. currency hanging from his left front pocket of his pants, had lotion on both of his hands, she stating she was engaging in an act of prostitution.... she was placed under arrest for soliciting prostitution and was transported to CCJH. ...probable cause exists to hold said person pending plea and trial.”*

The outcome of this arrest: a 12 year old girl was handcuffed, placed under arrest, and transported to the juvenile detention facility in Las Vegas. The man, nearly 48 years old, was

allowed to drive away. This child is now turning 15 years old and is again in juvenile detention under prostitution-related charges. Her pimp reclaimed her after she was released the first time and the cycle of her exploitation and lack of justice continues.

A domestic minor sex trafficking victim like the girl in the case above who is purchased for sex with an average of five men per night on five nights each week for five years would be exploited by more than 6,000 buyers during her victimization through prostitution. Our research revealed hundreds of children arrested, charged and prosecuted for prostitution, despite their status as minors and, therefore, as victims of child sex trafficking. Appropriate protective shelter and services are critical for the protection and restoration of child sex trafficking victims - but they do not exist.

What can Congress do? There are two actions Congress can take to fight this form of violence against women and girls in our country. First, Congress can reaffirm the intent of the TVPA 2000 to protect all women and children from commercial sexual exploitation, including U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents. Second, Congress has the opportunity and obligation to send a strong message to the fifty states that Congress intends for these children to be treated as victims and be given all of the services and justice which the TVPA provides. Congress must appropriate the federal funds authorized in the TVPRA 2005 for services and pilot shelters. The lack of appropriate shelter is cited as the biggest problem first responders face in protecting the child victims of sex trafficking. There is no place for these children to receive adequate protection and specialized services that will break the cycle of violence and victimization. The first responders who want to help are currently limited to placing the victim in a runaway youth shelter or juvenile detention in the absence of a safe, secure facility to protect these children. The dichotomy between the funded and provided services and shelter for foreign victims and those mandated but not funded for domestic victims must be cured.

The devaluation of children's lives through their exploitation in commercial sex markets is resulting in a breakdown of communities in nations around the world, including our own. Honorable Chairmen, members of the committee, on behalf of these children and the thousands more whose stories we will never hear, we urge you to take aggressive action to protect the girls of every nation who will soon be women made vulnerable by the continuing violence they have endured.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you our findings on this important issue. I would like to applaud your leadership and commitment and thank you for holding this hearing.

###