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Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission of the U.S. House of Representatives

Honorable Committee Chairmen Wolf and McGovern, and distinguished members of the Committee, it is an honor to provide testimony on the matter of National and International Implications of Human Trafficking.

Shared Hope International has been working to prevent sex trafficking and rescue and restore women and children who have suffered 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 to the women are the health risks directly resulting from 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. The resulting trauma bond is a real psychological condition that takes extensive therapy to address, and keeps them in slavery even in a free world.

We have 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 that has passed extensive trafficking laws making the buying and selling of human beings for sex a crime. Her story shows that even though India has a law against sex slavery, 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.

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.

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 [cool] 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.

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.

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--thus the failure to see the importance of pursuing 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). 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.

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 work to create the trauma bond that holds them prisoner. In all locations, tolerance for the commercial sex industry and 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.

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. A domestic minor sex trafficking victim 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.

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 that 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 that while efforts are being taken, much more must be initiated to fight this problem effectively. (See 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?” We should find out in the 2010 TIP Report which will, for the first time, evaluate the United States under the same criteria as other countries.

What can Congress do? There are two actions Congress can take to fight this form of violence against women and girls in our country and combat the national crisis we are facing. 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. This protection must include prosecution of the demand – the buyers of commercial sex from trafficking victims. Direction to the Department of Justice can make the TVPA effective in prosecuting all of the criminals involved in trafficking, from the trafficker to the buyer. The impact on our nation of exploding demand for commercial sex is resulting in growing numbers of youth being commercially sexually exploited. Deterrence is best effected through prosecution of the offenders.

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. Federal funds authorized in the TVPRA 2005 for services and pilot shelters for juvenile victims have not been appropriated. States are not prioritizing the adoption and implementation of safe harbor laws that would remove a trafficking victim from the criminal justice response and place the child appropriately within a child protection response. 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

victims of today will not grow to be the productive citizens of tomorrow without intervention and restoration. The disparity 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.

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