Linda Smith Bio

Linda Smith is a leader in the global movement to end sex trafficking of women and children around the world and in the United States. In 1998, while still a member of the U.S. Congress, Linda traveled to Falkland Road in Mumbai, India—one of the worst brothel districts in the world. The hopeless faces of desperate women and children forced into prostitution compelled her to found Shared Hope International (SHI) to support creation of shelter and services for sex trafficking survivors in several countries using a comprehensive model for restoration. Through partnership with local organizations, SHI provides education and job skills training via the Women’s Investment Network (WIN) at Homes and Villages of Hope built with funds raised as a non-profit organization. In the United States, Linda’s passion to fight against the market that fuels demand for sex with minors has positioned Shared Hope as a recognized leader in training, prevention strategies, research and policy initiatives; these efforts culminated in the 2020 opening of the **Shared Hope Institute for Justice and Advocacy** in Washington, DC.

Linda’s early efforts involved founding the War Against Trafficking Alliance (WATA) in 2001 to coordinate regional and international efforts necessary to combat sex trafficking. In 2003, WATA co-sponsored the World Summit with the U.S. Department of State, uniting leaders from 114 nations that demonstrated sustained commitment to protect the vulnerable from the sex trade. Six international summits followed, leading governments in under-achieving nations to pass human trafficking laws and plan for enforcement. In 2006, SHI spearheaded the U.S. Mid-Term Review on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)—bringing together leaders from across the United States to assess progress made in combating the sexual slavery of children in America. The U.S. Mid-Term Review on CSEC in America was the basis for a United States – Canada Regional Consultation in preparation for the 2008 World Congress III Against CSEC, where the report was presented by Shared Hope as part of the U.S. delegation.

Under a grant from the U.S. Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Linda and her team conducted field research in Jamaica, the Netherlands, Japan, and the U.S. to investigate the business model fueling the sex industry. These findings were compiled in the 2007 publication of the DEMAND. report and the production of a documentary by the same name.

Since 2006, Linda and SHI have worked in partnership with human trafficking task forces in cities across the U.S. to provide research, training, and technical assistance. With funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, SHI conducted four years of research on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking (DMST)—the exploitation of American children through prostitution, pornography or sexual performance. In 2009, Linda presented the findings in The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America’s Prostituted Children to Congress. By examining the governmental and nongovernmental efforts and gaps in addressing child sex trafficking in the U.S. this research pioneered today’s movement against child sex slavery in America. Both DEMAND. and the National Report have been entered into the Congressional Record. Using this research as a platform, Linda is an advocate for a strengthened response at the federal level, and has been instrumental in helping states design legislative frameworks to protect the innocence of America’s children.

In 2011, Linda commissioned the **Protected Innocence Challenge**, a landmark initiative to assess every state’s laws as they relate to or impact domestic minor sex trafficking. Over a nine-year period, the Protected Innocence Challenge report cards helped guide strategy for states to comprehensively combat child sex trafficking through identifying gaps in state laws and providing a blueprint for legislative action. In 2020, to encourage momentum in legal protections for victims of sex trafficking, Shared Hope announced an advanced legislative framework which will be used to grade state laws and provide **Report Cards on Child and Youth Sex Trafficking** beginning in 2021. Along with her focus on policy during these years, Linda also oversaw the creation of integrated training and awareness tools designed for law enforcement, therapists, healthcare professionals and advocates from all walks aimed at educating a variety of audiences using a multi-dimensional approach.

As a foremost expert on international and domestic trafficking, Linda has spoken out against the trafficking of women and children in numerous Congressional hearings and in national and international forums, such as the World Conference on Trafficking and the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission on the Protection of Children. She has participated in more than 300 media interviews, and has appeared on CNN, MSNBC, USA Today, Dan Rather Reports, ABC News, the Dr. Phil show, O’Reilly Factor, and CBN. Linda received the 2009 Soroptimist Making a Difference for Women Award and the 2010 Soroptimist Ruby Award: For Women Helping Women. Linda has been published in news outlets and journals around the world; including The New York Times, the Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, the International Review of Penal Law, and the Regent University Law Review.

While in Congress she served on the Human Rights Caucus, a position that provided her initial exposure to the horror of sex slavery. Her compassionate and uncompromising belief that every individual has dignity has carried her from advocating for permanent safe homes for children as the State Senate chair of the Children and Family Services Committee, to the halls of Congress, and ultimately to searching out victims in red light districts around the world. Linda lives in Vancouver, Washington and is the author of three books, the most recent, Invading the Darkness, was released in 2019.