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Cat Calls

U.S. State Department showcases legal prostitution for international visitors.

By Donna M. Hughes

Last week, the State Department took a Southeast Asian delegation for a tour of a brothel in Nevada. As a part of the International Visitor's Program, nine people from the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia visited the [Moonlite Bunny Ranch](#) and heard lectures on legal prostitution. In case there is any doubt what "services" the Moonlite Bunny Ranch provides, pornographic photos of the women available for prostitution can be viewed on the website of the [Nevada Brothels Network](#).

According to a reporter from the *Nevada Appeal*, the group was engaged in a discussion of prostitution led by the Nevada state archivist Sam Evans and a representative for the Moonlite Bunny Ranch. They explained that historically Nevada was a state with many men who needed a sexual outlet. Nevada accommodated them by legalizing prostitution in a move that was described as "progressivism." From that point, the discussion moved on to what was "healthy" and "normal" sexual behavior.

Taking foreign visitors to brothels in Nevada seems to be an ongoing practice of the State Department. In August 1999, I gave a presentation on trafficking of women and children for prostitution to a group of U.S. Information Agency visitors from East Asia. They told me they too had visited a brothel in Nevada as part of their tour.

As experts on trafficking in women and children in their own countries, these visitors were keen observers of the universal nature of prostitution in brothels. One woman told me that in her home country the pimps and brothel owners tightly control the women and she was curious to find out if this was the case in the "progressive" legal system in Nevada. She said that before they arrived at the brothel the group had been assured that they could talk freely with the women and ask any questions they wanted. But once inside the brothel no questions or direct communication with the women was allowed. The woman said, "They are in the same condition as women in my country. It is no different."

International visitors have also been taken to visit another pro-prostitution organization. In February, another State Department international group visited the California Prostitutes Education Project (Cal-PEP) in Oakland. The organization receives funding for HIV/AIDS education and prevention, but it is also a well-known prostitution-advocacy group. The founder and current director, Gloria Lockett, was formerly affiliated with C.O.Y.O.T.E. (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), one of the oldest organizations in the U.S. that calls for the legalization of prostitution. Cal-PEP is part of a pro-prostitution network that works for the rights of so called "sex workers" by advocating the legalization or decriminalization of prostitution.

Cal-PEP's is well known for its shady past. Ten years ago, the *San Francisco Examiner* did an exposé on Cal-PEP revealing that although the organization was officially headed by Lockett, it was really being run by a man who was formerly her pimp and had been convicted of racketeering and tax evasion in connection with running a multi-state prostitution ring, which included girls as young as 16. Today, Cal-PEP still receives funds for doing AIDS education and prevention.

The philosophy and mission of Cal-PEP is to have prostitution treated as a form of work that could be regulated by Occupational Safety & Health Administration. As a result of wanting

prostitution to be viewed as a job like any other, according to a San Francisco anti-prostitution activist, Cal-PEP blocks any dialogue on violence and trauma connected to prostitution because that would not fit their advocacy of prostitution as work.

The purpose of these particular State Department visitors' tours is to teach the participants about human trafficking and how the U.S. is combating the problem. One might conclude from the program of a visiting brothel and a pro-prostitution organization that the State Department is telling international visitors that legalization of prostitution is a solution to trafficking.

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