

Donna M. Hughes

May 01, 2006, 7:34 a.m.

Chancellor Missing Her Chance

Angela Merkel's World Cup trafficking silence.

By Donna M. Hughes

German Chancellor Angela Merkel hasn't said a word about what has much of Europe and human-rights activists around the world abuzz—the trafficking of tens of thousands of women to “sexually service” hundreds of thousands of men attending the World Cup games in Germany this summer.

In the twelve host cities, local government officials have teamed up with pimps to ensure the availability of facilities to meet the anticipated demand. In Berlin, a brothel that houses 100 women has recently opened, with publicly announced plans to operate on a 24/7 basis. Cities plan to issue special permits to women so they can solicit on the street. In Dortmund and Cologne, officials are constructing small “sex huts” to accommodate the anticipated “business.”

Officials have adopted what they call a “pragmatic approach” to the exploding sex trade. When Germany legalized prostitution they said it was no longer a “moral issue,” so no one is supposed to raise an eyebrow at the “sexual services” now available to men or to the role of local governments in facilitating the activity. It's just good planning for the million or more fans who will come to German and expect entertainment in between games.

Legalization of prostitution was supposed to end the trafficking of women by turning “sex work” into a job like any other with health benefits and the right to unionize for the women and tax revenue for the cities. None of this has happened. No empowered sex workers. No increase in tax revenue. What has happened is increased trafficking of women by criminals and mafias to meet the increased demand for more women in prostitution.

German officials are in denial about what the rest of the world sees: There is a human-rights disaster in the making in the coming months. In short: Where are all the women needed for this increased demand for prostitution going to come from? And under what conditions will they “work”?

For the most part, they won't be German women. Over three quarters of the women in prostitution in Germany are foreign nationals, the majority of them from poorer Central and Eastern European countries. The German Women's Council estimates that 40,000 women will be brought into Germany to service the soccer fans. Experts estimate that most of them are trafficked, meaning they are in prostitution as a result of force, fraud, or coercion. In most cases, they are literally controlled and in many cases effectively enslaved by criminals and organized crime groups.

Although officials in German seem to be numb to the pending orgy of human-rights violations,

many others are sounding the alarm. The European parliament has called for Germany to take appropriate measures to combat trafficking. A Swedish official urged his country to withdraw from the games. A Portuguese official has condemned the “mega exploitation of forced prostitution.” The Council of Europe called for Germany to set up multilingual telephone hotlines for women. The National Women’s Council of Ireland has launched a public awareness campaign called “Buying Sex is Not a Sport.” European chiefs of police discussed the increase in the trafficking of women for the World Cup games at a recent meeting.

Even the soccer federation and country coaches are concerned and issuing statements. In a remarkable statement, Raymond Domenech, coach of France’s team has made clear that the association of sex trafficking with the World Cup will seriously debase the sport. He said: “It is truly scandalous. People are talking about women, importing them to satisfy the base instincts of people associated with football. It is humiliating enough for me that football is linked with alcohol and violence. But this is worse. It is slaves that will come and be put into houses. Human beings are being talked about like cattle, and football is linked with that.”

In Germany, the president of the German Police Union has joined the “Red Card for Forced Prostitution” campaign, saying he wants to help raise public awareness that prostitution can be “a form of modern slavery.”

The one voice missing from this cacophony of concern and protest is Chancellor Merkel’s. She is missing a great opportunity. But it’s not too late to avoid the domestic and international condemnation certain to result from her continuing failure to take action. She can step forward to defend some of the most vulnerable victims in the world. She can show vision as a leader concerned about human rights. And she can do so with the support of police officials, feminists, and leaders of the political right, left, and center. Her own party, the Christian Democrats, opposed the legalization of prostitution several years ago. Who would disagree—the pimps, traffickers, and mostly foreign fans who wouldn’t be able to buy sex?

Merkel’s silence and the complicity of German officials in this mass violation of women’s human rights will cause permanent damage for Germany within the European Union and with the U.S. Already Germany is acquiring the reputation as the world’s most callous exploiter of women—a disgraceful distinction for Germany’s first woman chancellor.

—Donna M. Hughes is professor and Carlson Endowed Chair in Women's Studies at the University of Rhode Island.

National Review Online - <http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=OTU1MzY4NmUxYWExYWMzYzcyNGE1MzIwNDRmZGVhOGU=>