

# **The Corruption of Civil Society: Maintaining the Flow of Women to the Sex Industries**

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**Encuentro Internacional Sobre Trafico De Mujeres Y Explotacion**

**Andalusian Women's Institute, Malaga, Spain  
23 September 2002**

## ***Introduction***

This paper – “The Corruption of Civil Society” – will discuss how government policies in destination or receiving countries are facilitating the flow of women from sending or source countries into prostitution.

The trafficking process begins in destination countries with the demand for women and children to be used in prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation in the sex industry. Where the sex industries are large or the demand for prostitution is high, insufficient numbers of local women can be recruited. Brothel owners and pimps place orders with traffickers for the number of foreign women they need.

In destination countries, strategies are devised to protect the sex industries that generate hundreds of millions of dollars per year for the state, where prostitution is legal. Where prostitution is illegal, organized crime groups and corrupt officials make the profit. The profits of these legal and illegal sex industries depend on maintaining the flow of foreign women.

I will discuss two ways I see that policies and funding are being used to create laws and domestic policies in sending countries that benefit the destination countries.

**Overt Government Policy** – wherein the destination country passes laws legalizing the sex industry and publicly supports policies that maintain the flow of women from sending countries into its sex industries.

**Covert Government Policy** – wherein a pro-prostitution faction works within destination countries' government agencies to influence funding and policies in sending countries that will promote legalization of prostitution and maintain the flow of women into the sex industries. The policies they are promoting are often contrary to official government policy.

## ***The Corruption of Civil Society***

Corruption occurs when someone in a position of authority or influence uses their power to benefit themselves and other parties rather than the ones they are empowered to represent. Corruption thrives in environments where civil society is weak and the public institutions, in this case NGOs, are not accountable to their constituencies. An example of such corruption is when NGOs in sending countries work to benefit the sex industries of the destination countries rather than the women of their country.

The two countries I will use to discuss this phenomenon are Russia and Ukraine.

Prostitution has never been considered a legitimate form of work in Eurasia, particularly in Russia and Ukraine. Prohibition of prostitution has been the policy in this region for 100s of years. Before the Soviet revolution, the position of women's NGOs was to combat prostitution and assist women in getting out of prostitution.<sup>1</sup>

During the Soviet period, prostitution was suppressed and officially abolished. Even though today the general public recognizes economic hardships and high unemployment, there is no indication that people in general have changed their attitude towards prostitution. Although some people may have sympathy for a woman who is in prostitution to feed her family, prostitution is not viewed as acceptable work. A woman who is or has been a prostitute is highly stigmatized. The general public considers prostitution to be harmful for women and society.<sup>2</sup> The majority of people from sending countries oppose the flow of women to the sex industries in destination countries.

Recently, surveys have been done on the public's awareness and views on trafficking and prostitution abroad. In Ukraine, a survey of the general public revealed their attitudes towards women in prostitution abroad.<sup>3</sup> Eighty-five percent of those surveyed indicated that they were aware of trafficking in women from Ukraine. Concerning their attitude toward the women, 78 percent said that the woman was the victim of a crime who required assistance. The remaining 22 percent said that the woman is guilty, and had no sympathy for what happens to her. None of the respondents thought trafficking and prostitution abroad was a form of acceptable work. The stigma against women who are in prostitution is so strong that 75 percent of the respondents said they would not maintain contact with a daughter if they knew she was in prostitution.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) conducted a survey of almost 1200 (1,189) women and girls, aged 15 to 35, in ten urban regions of Ukraine. Although many young women are eager to travel abroad to seek jobs, prostitution was viewed as absolutely unacceptable. When asked if "a job in the sex industry" was an "acceptable job abroad," none of the women and girls in any age group (Ages 15-17, 18-19, 20-24, 25-35) said yes.<sup>4</sup>

Soviet rule suppressed independent women's organizations and charities; consequently, civil society is under developed.<sup>5 6</sup> Still, a number of women's NGOs that oppose trafficking and the sexual exploitation of women in prostitution have formed. For example, in 1999 at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the World Federation of the Ukrainian Women's Organizations and World Movement of Mothers called for governments to work toward suppressing the trafficking of women and girls by implementing the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, most grassroots NGOs in Ukraine and Russia do not have the resources to travel to international conferences and are not invited to participate in anti-trafficking forums or conferences. Consequently, their voices are not heard.

Destination countries have a stake in protecting their sex industries and maintaining the flow of women from sending countries, such as Russia and Ukraine. One way of promoting their interests is to fund NGOs in sending countries that promote the destination country's point of view on prostitution and trafficking. Governments in destination countries have thus corrupted the nascent civil society by funding NGOs that promote pro-prostitution laws and policies in the sending countries. Their purpose is to legitimize and maintain the flow of women to the sex industries abroad. It is not in the interests of governments that overtly or covertly protect their sex industries to give money to NGOs that oppose the flow of tens of thousands women to their brothels, or give a voice to groups who speak out against the abuse and exploitation of their sisters, daughters, and friends in prostitution abroad.

The well-funded NGOs in the sending countries, like Ukraine and Russia, are invited to conferences abroad. There, they represent their funder's perspective, not the grassroots voices of people at home. Thereby, the authentic voices of citizens in sending countries have been supplanted by the voice of the destination countries.

## **Overt Government Policy**

The demand for women to be used in prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation in destination countries is the driving force behind trafficking. Governments of most destination countries consistently act, either overtly or covertly, to protect their sex industries.<sup>8</sup>

The Netherlands is such an example. It is a major destination country in Western Europe, with 2000 brothels and numerous escort services, using an estimated 30,000 women.<sup>9 10</sup> Prostitution and related forms of sexual exploitation is a US\$1 billion a year industry making up five percent of the Dutch economy.

Sixty to 70 percent of the women in prostitution in the Netherlands are not citizens of the Netherlands or other European Union countries.<sup>11 12</sup> In one study, 79 percent of women in prostitution gave an indication that they were in prostitution due to some degree of force.<sup>13</sup>

The Netherlands legalized brothels and pimping in October 2000, and has taken a leading role in normalizing the prostitution of women. The Netherlands has indicated that it will create a legal apparatus to maintain the flow of women from sending countries to its brothels. In Ukraine, at a conference on trafficking in women, a representative of the Netherlands defended the demand for and exploitation of women in prostitution. "The demand is already there. We can't eradicate the demand. We will regulate it. Grant permits. Make them pay taxes."<sup>14</sup> To get around the lack of a local supply of women for the brothels, he explained that the flow of women from sending countries could be legalized: "EU citizens can work there legally. Other countries may have women with *working skills* that will benefit the Netherlands. We could create special permits that will allow foreign nationals to engage in prostitution."<sup>15</sup> Already agents in the Netherlands have offered to assist in fulfilling the demand through a quota of work permits. One organization that claims it supports the rights of prostitutes in the Netherlands, said, "There is a huge demand for foreign women." This organization has offered to create an agency that mediates between pimps and foreign women.<sup>16</sup>

Another way the Netherlands defends its sex industry is to use its power and influence to shape laws and policies on trafficking and prostitution that favor their industries and maintain the flow of women from sending countries. To do this, they fund NGOs throughout central and eastern European sending countries to represent their policies. At a conference on trafficking of women in Ukraine, the representative of the Netherlands told the audience about the role his government is playing in funding NGOs. "The Netherlands was the first to provide funding to NGOs...the Netherlands provides 80 percent of the funding for [a well-known anti-trafficking NGO network in central and eastern Europe]."<sup>17</sup> These groups support legalization of prostitution and advocate for laws and policies that will enable what they call "migrant sex work." These pro-prostitution groups then oppose the grassroots NGOs who are trying to stop the trafficking and prostitution of women.

These NGOs do work on prevention and awareness of trafficking, and assisting victims to return home. Unfortunately, in setting their policies on prostitution and trafficking, these well-funded NGOs do not consult women or citizens in general, but adopt the positions of their funders. For example, in 1998, in a televised debate on prostitution in the Ukraine, the Netherlands funded NGO advocated for the legalization of prostitution against a poor grassroots Ukrainian NGO, which opposed that view.<sup>18</sup>

## **Covert Government Policy**

The other way that civil society is corrupted in sending countries is by covert government policy, whereby a pro-prostitution faction works within government agencies to influence funding and policies in sending countries that will promote legalization of prostitution and maintain the flow of women from sending countries into the sex industries.

The example of this I am going to talk about is the United States. In the United States, most local and state governments have prohibitionist policies and laws on prostitution. On the federal level, in 2000, the

U.S. Congress passed an anti-trafficking law that takes an abolitionist position. Yet, there is a covert government policy that is promoting the legalization of prostitution in sending countries. The covert policy is implemented by a group of people who control decision making in funding agencies within the U.S. government. They use the power of funding to influence NGOs within sending countries to support legalization of prostitution and promote policies and laws that will enable what they call “migrant sex work.”

Because this group operates covertly, it is more difficult to document, but I believe we have collected enough evidence to demonstrate how they are carrying out their agenda in Russia.

In Russia, there are several dozen grassroots anti-trafficking NGOs that formed a coalition in the late 1990s. Individually and together, they have presented many prevention and awareness programs in local communities. They have conducted the largest survey to date in Russia on attitudes and knowledge about sex trafficking. Last year, they conducted the first nationwide anti-trafficking media campaign. They have assisted victims of trafficking to return to their hometowns and provided counseling to survivors.

At the beginning of 2001, the organizer of the coalition was approached and asked if she, along with the coalition, would support the legalization of prostitution in Russia. They were told that their funding was at risk if they did not. Another anti-trafficking organization told the organizer of this coalition that if they did not support legalization of prostitution, they would no longer be affiliated with them because it would put their funding at risk. In other words, they needed to be aligned only with groups that supported legalization of prostitution. Over the next few months, a number of the small grassroots NGOs were contacted by phone or in person and told that they needed to withdraw from the coalition or they would not be considered for U.S. funding. A disinformation campaign was started to smear the work and reputation of the grassroots coalition of anti-trafficking organizations.

By mid-2001, US government funds for the grassroots coalition were cut and their proposals turned down. The indigenous grassroots coalition representing the women and children of Russia was without funds to continue their anti-trafficking work. So, those threatening the funding of the grassroots coalition if they did not support legalization were successful in carrying out their threats.

In the mean time in the U.S., an NGO that previously had done no work on trafficking received funding to hold a policy forum at the U.S. State Department. Recommendations from the policy forum supported a change in migration laws to allow a flow of women for prostitution from Eastern and Central Europe.<sup>19</sup> “Migrating sex workers are simply responding to a demand for their labor.”<sup>20</sup> Throughout the document, prostitution is redefined as a form of work. There is a recommendation that prostitution should be decriminalized. “Sex work” is said to be empowering for women because it enables them to migrate to other countries giving them “greater economic independency and autonomy from men.”<sup>21</sup>

These recommendations were made without consultation with, support, or even awareness of the majority of people in sending countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

Over the past year, the NGO who sponsored the pro-prostitution policy forum and has previously done no anti-trafficking work has been awarded major grants, totaling a couple of million dollars, to do anti-trafficking work in Russia. This NGO now controls 100 percent of the US government funding for anti-trafficking projects in Western Russia and Siberia.

This past summer, the Union of Rightist Forces (SPS), a political party in Russia announced its intention to write a law to legalize prostitution in Russia.<sup>22</sup> A number of Deputies in the Duma belong to this party, including, Elena Mizulina, the Deputy in charge of the Duma Committee to rewrite the criminal code for Russia. She has announced that she will submit new to legalize prostitution in Russia. A number of us believe that the well-funded pro-prostitution NGOs in Russia will work with this Deputy to draft a complementary anti-trafficking law.

This pro-prostitution work is done covertly. When the well-funded NGOs are challenged, they deny that they support legalization of prostitution. I will give you an example: This summer I attended a presentation by a representative of another US NGO that does work on economic development for women in Central Europe. She said in her presentation: "Legalization of prostitution is one approach we are looking at. The women do not have entrepreneurial skills. We must look at all the alternatives. It is better for the women if prostitution is legal, then we can help them unionize. That is the reality." I do not think the woman or the organization consulted the people of Yugoslavia to determine if they supported the legalization and unionization of prostitution as a form of employment for their unskilled women workers. When I repeated this statement, the president of the NGO wrote to me and said that neither the organization nor its representative "now advocate or have ever advocated unionization or legalization of prostitution."<sup>23</sup> I stand by what I heard the woman say.

The advocacy of legalized prostitution and so called "migrant sex work" is a covert policy of those with influence in government funding agencies. Official representatives of Bush administration repeatedly say that they oppose the legalization of prostitution and that is the position of the U.S. government.

## ***Conclusion***

I have described how destination countries, either overtly or covertly, use funding of NGOs in sending countries to enable the flow of women into prostitution. These NGOs do not represent the majority views of the citizens of the sending countries. They operate in the poorest countries in Eastern and Central Europe that are the source for most of the women trafficked into Western Europe. They represent and promote the pro-prostitution views of the government of the destination countries or a minority of people that have influence in funding agencies.

This is nothing less than an old colonialist strategy of funding and promoting organizations in target countries that favor policies that enable the colonialists to access and exploit natural resources. In this case, the "natural resources" exported from sending countries are women.

I believe we must find a way to give a voice to the grassroots NGOs who are concerned about the well being of women. The majority of the people in sending countries do not want a significant portion of their young women to be used in sex industries around the world. They want economic development assistance and programs that create opportunities for women. They want an end to official corruption and bribery that facilitates the trafficking of women. Those of us who live in destination countries need to do more to stop the demand for women by the sex industries in our countries. I believe those of us with access to conferences such as this one need to make sure we are representing the interests of the women in sending countries, and not facilitating the flow of women for the sex industries.

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- <sup>1</sup> The Kiev branch of The Russian Society for the Protection of Women, founded in 1900, was dedicated to helping poor women, especially those in prostitution. They ran a dormitory for women, a free legal clinic, a literacy program, a sewing school, and provided meals at a cafeteria. Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, *Feminists Despite Themselves: Women in Ukrainian Community Life, 1884-1939*. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1988, p. 36.
- <sup>2</sup> Svetlana Iliina and I. Kalugin, "The Russian customers of sex service's attitudes towards prostitution and violence," *Journal of Trauma Practice* (forthcoming, 2002).
- <sup>3</sup> Three hundred and fifty-nine people were surveyed in six regional cities: Zaporizhia (100), Lvov (100), Kharkov (60), Chernigov (59), Kherson (20), and Donetsk (20). Respondents were a cross section of the population, including employees at private firms and state offices, teachers, accountants, pensioners, students, health care workers, laborers, prisoners and unemployed.
- <sup>4</sup> International Organization for Migration, "Slavic women trafficked into slavery," *Trafficking in Migrants Quarterly Bulletin* (Geneva, Switzerland: International Organization for Migration, June 1998).
- <sup>5</sup> Svetlana V. Kupryashkina, "Women and voluntary activities in Ukraine: A historic outlook and a view of Soviet state paternalism," Accessed at <http://antenna.nl/ywd/Gatherings/NIS/kupryash.html>
- <sup>6</sup> Paul D'Anieri, Robert Kravhuk, and Taras Kuzio, "Politics and Civil Society" in *Politics and Society in Ukraine*, Westview, 1999, pp: 141-165.
- <sup>7</sup> "Statement submitted by the World Federation of the Ukrainian Women's Organizations and World Movement of Mothers, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council," Commission on the Status of Women, Forty-second session, 2-13 March 1999. The statement was also signed by Zona International, the National Council on Family Relations, the International Union of Family Organizations, the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations, the Women's International Democratic Federation, the International Health Awareness Network, the International Federation on Ageing, World Information Transfer, the International Alliance on Women, and the Global Alliance for Women's Health.
- <sup>8</sup> Sweden is an exception. For a description of Sweden's policy on prostitution as a form of violence against women see <http://www.kvinnofrid.gov.se/regeringen/faktaeng.htm>
- <sup>9</sup> Jason Bennetto, "Licensed brothels created problems for Dutch officials," *The Independent*, 9 April 2001.
- <sup>10</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, The Netherlands, "Report to CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women)," July 2000.
- <sup>11</sup> Suzanne Daley, "New rights for Dutch prostitutes, but no gain," *New York Times*, 12 August 2001.
- <sup>12</sup> *HP-De Tijd*, 16 February 2001.
- <sup>13</sup> The Dutch Institute of Social Sexological Research, cited in The Netherlands Report to CEDAW, July 2000, p. 226-227.
- <sup>14</sup> Carel Hofstra, 3<sup>rd</sup> Secretary, Netherlands Embassy, Kyiv, Ukraine, *US-Ukraine Regional Law Enforcement Workshop Against Trafficking in Women and Children*, Kyiv, Ukraine, 21-23 June 2000.
- <sup>15</sup> Carel Hofstra, 3<sup>rd</sup> Secretary, Netherlands Embassy, Kyiv, Ukraine, *US-Ukraine Regional Law Enforcement Workshop Against Trafficking in Women and Children*, Kyiv, Ukraine, 21-23 June 2000.
- <sup>16</sup> *HP-De Tijd*, 16 February 2001 (translated by Semira Dallali).
- <sup>17</sup> Carel Hofstra, 3<sup>rd</sup> Secretary, Netherlands Embassy, Kyiv, Ukraine, *US-Ukraine Regional Law Enforcement Workshop Against Trafficking in Women and Children*, Kyiv, Ukraine, 21-23 June 2000.
- <sup>18</sup> Tatyana Travina, Vice-President, DANA, Email from Elena Kabashnaya, "Ukrainian La Strada speaks for legalization of prostitution in Ukraine," 26 September 1998.

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- <sup>19</sup> Melanie H. Ram, “Putting an End to the Trafficking of Women in the NIS and CEE,” International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), 16 August 2000.
- <sup>20</sup> Melanie H. Ram, “Putting an End to the Trafficking of Women in the NIS and CEE,” International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), 16 August 2000, p. 2.
- <sup>21</sup> IREX, “Putting an end to trafficking of women in the NIS and CEE,” Policy Forum at the State Department, 16 August 2000. [http://www.irex.org/publications-resources/policy-papers/trafficking\\_women.pdf](http://www.irex.org/publications-resources/policy-papers/trafficking_women.pdf).
- <sup>22</sup> Viktoria Maliutina, “Advocates of market reform turn to prostitution,” *gazeta.ru*, July 12, 2002.
- <sup>23</sup> Letter from Margaret Goodman, Coordinator for Government Relations, World Learning, June 26, 2002.