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“A Special Evil”

Bush vs. slavery.

By Donna M. Hughes

At the United Nations, before key world leaders and an international body that symbolizes human rights, President Bush put the fight against the global sex trade on par with the campaign for democracy in Iraq and the war on terrorism. A significant portion of his U.N. speech was dedicated to a "humanitarian crisis...yet hidden from view," by which he meant the trafficking and prostitution of hundreds of thousands of women and children. In keeping with Bush's speeches on threats to freedom and democracy in the world, there were no qualifiers or exceptions; he boldly named this activity for what it is: "a special evil." And as he has done with terrorism, he challenged governments around the world on their complacency: If they tolerate the sex trade, they "are tolerating a form of slavery." This is the kind of clarity of thinking and leadership the movement against trafficking and sexual exploitation has been waiting for.

And he did not stop there. He firmly stated his position on one of the most-avoided questions in the debate on the global sex trade — how to respond to the men who patronize the brothels and create the demand for women and girls. President Bush clearly said, "Those who patronize this industry debase themselves and deepen the misery of others." One sentence that so simply places responsibility on those who need to be held accountable for the harm they cause to women, children, their families, and communities.

In those few minutes, he addressed crucial issues and provided leadership on some of the key battlefronts.

Men who sexually abuse and exploit children often travel to other countries to find victims and avoid arrest. For over six years, [ECPAT-USA \(End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes\)](#) has campaigned with limited success to get the tourist industry and airlines to advise travelers that if they have sex with children while abroad they are breaking the law. At the U.N., President Bush urged all governments to "inform travelers of the harm this industry does and the severe punishments that will fall on its patrons." And for several years ECPAT-USA has frequently contacted the U.S. military in an effort to get them to be more active in stopping military personnel from sexually abusing and exploiting children while they are abroad. With the passage of the PROTECT Act and President Bush's high-priority call for action against perpetrators abroad, activists should finally see results from their efforts.

President Bush pledged \$50 million to support "the good work of organizations that are rescuing women and children from exploitation, and giving them shelter and medical treatment and the hope of a new life." President Bush's support for these organizations is particularly important, not only because the funds will provide much-needed services, but also because Christian and feminist organizations who organize rescues and provide shelter for victims in Asia are under attack from pro-prostitution groups who constantly criticize them and try to undermine their rescue work. Those who favor legalized prostitution know that if victims are free to speak their own truth the stories they tell about "empowered sex workers" will be proven to be lies.

There could not have been a better place than the United Nations to call for "clear standards"

on combating the global sex trade. Over the past decade, United Nations' commissions, committees, and conferences have been battlegrounds where governments and nongovernmental organizations have fought to determine if the global sex trade should be legitimized and legalized or criminalized and abolished. President Bush told the members of the United Nations that the U.S. now has clear standards on how the global sex trade should be viewed — "an underground of brutality and lonely fear" — and combated — "those who create these victims and profit from their suffering must be severely punished."

The people and groups I work with call themselves the new abolitionists. We believe that all people have the right to freedom and dignity and no forms of sexual abuse and exploitation, including those of the sex trade, should be tolerated. All the activists I've heard from were thrilled and inspired by President Bush's speech. One woman said this is going to "put new wind in the sails of the abolitionist movement." Another said, "That was the most courageous thing I have heard a president say since President Reagan's demand to 'tear down this wall' in Berlin."

The president's stated commitment to opposing the global sex trade places the U.S. on the forefront of a new movement for human freedom, rights, and dignity. It was fitting that he made this statement alongside a call for democracy building in Iraq and opposition to terrorism. The fight against the global sex trade is going to be the human-rights struggle of the coming decade. As an institution that embodies universal human rights, the United Nations was exactly the right place to deliver the call for action.

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