



4-8 July, 1999 XVI Soroptimist International Convention,
Helsinki, Finland

Human Rights/Status of Women - Interactive Panel

“Trafficking and Teenage Girls: How to Help Our Most Vulnerable Youth”

from *Janet Gregory Amtmann, San Diego Club, Desert Coast Region, SIA*

Chairman of the Panel: Dawn Marie Lemonds, SI Programme Coordinator

Members: Dr Juliette Engel, Guest Speaker

Dr Anele Heiges, Guest Speaker

Roswitha Benesch

Erika Leonhartsberger

The convention attendees listened in disbelief as the plight of young women sold into prostitution was told in video and personal stories in the panel session. Several important factors were outlined which have come together to make trafficking of women and girls a worldwide problem:

- Globalisation of economies
- Ease of transnational travel
- Sex on the internet
- Government Policies
- Patriarchy

We need to become consistent in documenting cases of trafficking to increase visibility of the issue, developing capability skills to deal with the issues and working in partnership with other NGO's and Government agencies.

The well organised sex industry's traffickers can easily entice young Russian women with “dreams of economic success”, said Dr Juliette Engel, Director and Founder of MiraMed. The demand for young virgin girls is high and so is the financial gain for the international crime syndicates.

Diane Sawyer of “20/20” stated that one million women are sold per year into the sex industry. Sadly, “human lives are always for sale”, she said. Prices for these teenagers range from 3,000 to 20,000 US dollars. They are subsequently trafficked in 43 countries around the world.

An Israeli brothel owner interviewed on “20/20” spoke of the ease of obtaining Russian women for his brothel with little or no opposition from law enforcement. These same women are kept under guard in deplorable living conditions, suffering from abuse and sickness. Brothel owners continue to make profits from the women by selling them from brothel to brothel. Soon it becomes impossible for the women to “buy back” their freedom. Ultimately, the women are deported, with only a few lucky enough to escape.

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The UN has scheduled a Congress on Transnational Crime to be held in September 2000. SI participation through our UN representation will bring our concerns for the trafficking of teenage girls and women to this International body. From this a Convention document will be generated.

The complexity of various governmental laws to regulate prostitution must be investigated. At the moment solutions seem to be to deport foreign prostitutes rather than shut down the brothels, jail the traffickers and address the issues. The victims are victimized again rather than pursuing the perpetrators of sex crimes.