



**Testimony**

of

**Michael E. O'Connor, Jr.  
Director of Operations, South Asia  
International Justice Mission**

before

**The Subcommittee on Domestic and International Monetary Policy, Trade and  
Technology  
Committee on Financial Services  
United States House of Representatives**

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Chairman Pryce, Ranking Member Maloney and distinguished members of Congress, my name is Michael O'Connor; I am Director of Operations, South Asia for International Justice Mission (IJM), an organization that rescues victims of violence, sexual exploitation, slavery and oppression throughout the world. IJM agents have spent thousands of hours infiltrating human trafficking operations. In 2004 alone, IJM helped to rescue more than 400 victims of forced labor or sex trafficking.

The June 2005 U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons ("TIP") Report estimates that between 600,000 and 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year and that minors comprise up to 50% of that total number. The organization Free the Slaves suggests that there are an estimated 27 million slaves in the world. The F.B.I. suggests that human trafficking generates an estimated \$9.5 billion in annual revenue.

These massive numbers should not obscure the fact that human trafficking exists because specific perpetrators make calculated decisions to harm others. Both the perpetrators and the victims are real people with real names and faces. Often, the victims are children. As but one example, on February 1, 2003, a brothel keeper in Svay Pak, Cambodia offered to provide an IJM undercover investigator with five young girls -- two of whom were in their early teen years and three of whom were even younger -- who would perform sex acts for \$30 per girl. The older two girls would provide both oral sex and sexual intercourse while the younger three girls would only provide oral sex -- or "yum yum" as the girls called it. This offer was not an anomaly. During a three-week IJM investigation in Svay Pak, approximately forty-five girls of fifteen years of age or younger were offered to our investigators. Based on IJM's investigation, the local police conducted a raid and rescued 37 girls. Ten of the rescued girls were approximately ten years old or younger. One of the ten was about five years old. To extrapolate, even if each of the 37 rescued girls had performed sex acts only once a day for the previous year, at \$30 an act the perpetrators' total gross receipts for the year would have been more than \$400,000 -- in a country where the per capita income in 2004 was a meager \$2,000.

In a more recent (2005) case in a Southeast Asian city, an informant told IJM that sex trafficking was taking place in certain brothels. An IJM investigator who confirmed the charge was told by a woman inside one of the brothels that she slept with, on average, five customers a night, at approximately \$26 per customer, thereby grossing approximately \$130 per night. The brothel contained about 200 girls and women. Extrapolating, the brothel might be grossing \$26,000 per night, or approximately 9.5 million dollars per year, presumably tax free.

There is, however, often an informal tax -- otherwise know as a bribe -- that ensures that sex trafficking flourishes. Trafficking is an economic crime. Trafficking enterprises, like other businesses, display their wares in a market, and markets need to ensure that the demand can find the supply. It is not hard to find trafficking victims. Inebriated perverts who want to have sex with children are able to find the victims. IJM investigators are also able to find the victims. So, why can't the police find the victims? To the point, human trafficking thrives only when and where the local enforcement authorities decide that they will not intervene to stop it. They don't stop it because they are overworked and understaffed, poorly trained or bribed. In at least one city where we work, approximately 39% of IJM-assisted police raids fail to free the targeted victims because the perpetrators are tipped-off. By the time the

police arrive at the brothel, either the brothel is “closed for the night” or the brothel is open but the victims have vanished.

Unfortunately, sometimes the police are not only taking bribes to ignore the problem. Sometimes, police officers are themselves the traffickers. Just last month, an IJM-initiated raid in a large Southeast Asian city led to the rescue of two minors and the arrest of a police officer for child sex trafficking offenses. Thankfully, the police officer has been charged and is currently sitting in jail. When questioned by the prosecutor about his activities, he did not deny the factual predicate for the charges, but rather stated that his superior officers had committed similar acts.

The reasons why some police officers accept bribes and commit crimes for profit are surely complex and go to the core of the flawed nature of the human condition. To focus on one aspect of the problem, and without making excuses for them, police officers in many places throughout the world receive desperately low wages, and the temptation to accept bribes is especially great for them. This past week, an IJM investigator and former F.B.I. agent who just returned from a trip to Cambodia reported to me that a middle-management counter-trafficking police officer in Cambodia stated that he makes less than \$40 a month as a police officer and has to work two other part-time jobs in order to support his family. Low wages are often the norm, even for those in relatively high level positions, in many police bureaucracies, ensuing that there are many places along the police chain-of-command where traffickers can attempt to exploit police officers’ financial vulnerabilities. But are the salaries of police officers in far flung corners of the globe a legitimate concern of the U.S. Congress? In today’s global economy, if other countries are not meeting the Congressionally-delineated minimum standards for countering human trafficking, it is surely the business of Congress to know why. International cooperation is critical in piercing international organized crime networks, tracing money flow, and repatriating victims to their homes. However, local cops on the beat in the countries of origin, transit and destination will bear the greatest burden in the fight against trafficking. I humbly suggest that it would be illuminating if the United States Government were to conduct an analysis of the take-home wages of police officers in TIP Report “tier two” and “tier three” countries, because Congress has an interest in determining whether or not countries who are failing to meet Congressionally-delineated minimum standards are paying their law enforcement authorities a living wage.

So we know that brothel keepers make a lot of money and that police officers take bribes, but what is the source of the revenue? To the point, in many places traffickers would not be able to make a profit but for the influx of foreign capital brought by travelers with fat wallets and deviant desires. The February 2003 Trafficking in Persons National Security Presidential Directive stated that sex tourism is “an estimated \$1 billion per year business worldwide.”

Sex tourism thrives in our midst. If this afternoon you go to Google and type in the words “sex tourism,” you will find more than 1.8 million results, and the site ranked second on Google is the “World Sex Archive” (“WSA”), which claims, in part, to be the “largest escort resource on the internet” and “is a place where fellow hobbyists gather to share information with one another through real time discussion boards on a variety of topics that deal with prostitution, escort services and sex tourism.” Among other things, the site seems to be used as way for sex tourists to get information from other sex tourists on where to travel to

find escorts or prostitutes. The website itself frankly suggests, *inter alia*, on its “You Need Access” page that

“You will save tons of money by joining this site. Imagine spending a ton of cash to travel somewhere only to find yourself yanking your [slang for male genitalia] because the cops busted all the [slang for female genitalia]? That would totally \_\_\_\_\_! But members of WSA are informed, they know the best places to go – we have chicas to yank our [slang for male genitalia] for us!”<sup>1</sup>

To be fair to the WSA webmaster, he strongly suggests that he will not tolerate discussion on the site regarding or pictures of minors. Nevertheless, one reason why sex tourism is so detrimental to the fight against child trafficking is that pedophiles can easily blend into the crowd, using the infrastructure supported by the sex tourism industry to access minors.

One posting still currently on the WSA website, dated January 19, 2002, is a query from a tourist who was preparing to visit Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic in late January 2002. In anticipation of the visit he wrote:

“I am interested in meeting small, petite, young (18, or ones who look younger) with light skin and haven’t had any babies. Am I asking too much? How can I meet these higher end girls and what would they cost per hour or per day? Are they best picked up a bar or Brothel? I’m 45 years old but I like them yung and babyless with a fine body and nice skin. What are the best place or people to contact for this kind? Are there newspaper ads that offer higher end girls .. Any comments ( + or - ) are appreciated. Do they mind if you video tape them while you are with them?”

Perhaps this man is looking merely for a small, petite, young platonic escort. In any case, when pimps throughout the world offer IJM undercover investigators someone who is “small,” “petite” and “young,” someone who is “18 or looks younger,” we know from experience that there is a good chance that the pimp is trafficking minors.

There is no denying that Western sex tourists bring large amounts of money into the developing world, and too many of them are searching for minors with whom to have sex. One such tourist was Donald Bakker. He traveled from his home country of Canada to have sex with young girls in Svay Pak, Cambodia, where he made a videotape of himself and several prepubescent Cambodian girls performing sex acts. Thankfully, Canadian authorities later obtained the videotape, but they weren’t able to identify the location of the crime or the specific girls involved. In a remarkable coincidence, an officer assigned to investigate the Canadian case coincidentally watched a Dateline NBC special that showed footage of IJM’s Svay Pak investigation, mentioned earlier in my testimony. The Canadian police officer recognized that the IJM footage showed young girls in the same exact brothel room as featured in the Canadian’s man personal sex videotape. Bakker had visited Cambodia prior

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<sup>1</sup> The three terms in brackets replaced words that were redacted by me due to their coarse nature. A fourth coarse word was redacted but not replaced because I could not find a suitable alternative word. Instead, I left a space to demarcate the place of redaction.

to the IJM raid, and, remarkably, some of the girls rescued by IJM were among those previously videotaped with Mr. Bakker. Earlier this month, Bakker pled guilty to seven counts of sexual assault against the Cambodian children. It was the first conviction in Canada under a new law that allows Canadian authorities to criminally charge Canadians who travel to other countries to have sex with minors.

Thankfully, the U.S. Congress has passed a similar law, called the Protect Act. This law will help to discourage perverse Americans from committing such heinous crimes overseas. Child molesters are cowards, and, as such, many of them will be dissuaded from traveling as a result of the Act, but only if the Act is publicized. I suggest that Congress encourage the airline and travel agency industries to include links to Protect Act internet sites on their internet home pages. I also suggest that a brochure detailing the contours of the Protect Act be provided by the United States Government with each new and renewed U.S. passport in order to educate American travelers abroad, sending the clear message that the United States Government will have no tolerance for those who use a U.S. passport as a weapon against children and as a license to rape them. Furthermore, I suggest that United States citizens who are convicted of child sexual abuse crimes should, at the very least, have stamps placed in their passports alerting other countries of their convictions.

On behalf of my coworkers at International Justice Mission, I thank Chairman Pryce for the invitation to speak here today, for the attention of the Committee and for the bipartisan leadership of the U.S. Congress on this issue. I would especially like to thank Congress for its continued support of Ambassador John R. Miller, Ambassador-at-Large and Director of the U.S. Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking, for his tireless efforts to end modern-day slavery. The leadership of the United States Government on this issue is inspiring; it is government at its bipartisan best. The criminals who commit these crimes are determined, strong, organized and united. We who seek to end the scourge of illegal trafficking must be more so.

Thank you.