

God and the male sex tourist

The faith-based organisation, The MST, preach that men can aid in the fight against human trafficking by eliminating the demand.

Article: Tonya Stanfield

In some circles, including among members of the National Prosecuting Authority, the usual term B and B has been re-nicknamed "Bed and Brothel," because of the large number of rent by the hour accommodations springing up all over the country. According to police sources, many are packed to the brim with new, foreign arrivals.

What is especially disturbing is the number of women arriving through dubious means. The Weekend Argus recently reported the arrest of Pakistani crime syndicate members in possession of 100,000 false birth certificates and documents intended to import girls as "exotic dancers" to "gentlemen's clubs."



In another raid, police arrested 35 Eastern European dancers illegally working with permits normally issued for farm and mine workers. This is a worrying signal for the possibilities for human trafficking into the sex trade in the country.

Law enforcement agencies are busy targeting "the suppliers," i.e. the traffickers. Non-governmental organisations across the world focus on rescuing the victims, "the supply." Yet, human trafficking is the fastest growing organised crime in the world. Have we overlooked something?

"Eliminate the Demand," says Chris Lenty, the founder of an unusually faith-based organisation called The MST (Men in the Sex Trade) Project. Lenty preaches, "Men are part of the solution." He and his team from Thailand recently visited Cape Town to see how they could expand their ministry, which exclusively targets the buyers of sex, to the male sex tourists at global sporting events.

Leading up to the World Cup, there were dire predictions of large increases in both the supply and demand of sex workers. Along with

getting the stadiums and soccer balls ready, this expectation prompted President Jacob Zuma to request a 1 billion-condom donation from Britain. Britain responded by donating 42 million. That's one hundred for every soccer-frenzied tourist.

Whether the predictions of an out of control sex trade come true or not, just the promise of a tsunami of male sex tourists has impacted this nation, leaving a slew of new "Bed and Brothels" scattered throughout residential areas of our stadium cities. Demand, even just speculated demand, causes supply. To meet the demand, human trafficking is becoming a strategy of choice for unscrupulous brothel owners, individuals, and crime syndicates.

According to a June 2010 United States State Department Trafficking in Persons Report, „Worldwide, the [U.S.] State Department estimated there are 12.3 million adults and children in modern-day slavery - including forced labour, bonded labour and forced prostitution," an Inter Press Service reports. „That means just under two people in a thousand are victims of human trafficking. ..."

According to Val Lotan of the Organized Crime Division in Kwa-Zulu Natal, "In South Africa, eighty percent of all trafficking victims are forced into the sex trade."

Not only women forced into the sex trade against their will endure gross injustice. Many women who enter the sex trade willingly later find themselves trapped in the job, unable to quit, due to the threats of their pimps and brothel owners.

A colleague of mine began meeting regularly with a street sex worker who wanted counsel on leaving the sex trade. Her pimp showed up at the coffee shop where they met, forcibly dragged her onto the street and

his private choices will be confined to the brothel, the car, or the computer he is surfing the web with. (Yes, people are trafficked into the pornography trade as well

But, like the environment, we as a global culture are interconnected. We cannot escape the fact that the brand of clothes we buy may fuel sweatshops in China. The coffee we drink may enslave children picking coffee beans in the Ivory Coast. What we look at on-line, may affect the freedom and life of a young man or woman in another nation, or our own.

A mass awareness programme in the United States has empowered the American consumer culture to buy their goods from “non-trafficked” sources of labor. For example, an application on an I-phone can tell the American consumer which brand of tyre rates the highest on the “fair trade” scale.

As a global culture, we must become more educated and aware, and then we can change our patterns of behavior. But, we must first accept this simple fact: “What we do in the dark does not stay in the dark.”

Private choices have global consequences.

Lenty has seen his ministry turn away from the red light districts of Thailand and transform their lives. Because of the addictive, secretive side many patrons of the sex industry struggle with, Lenty believes men of faith need to mentor others. He’s calling to men to rise up and lead their gender to sexual freedom and healthy choices.

“It is our responsibility to go to these men, when very few will, and bring the love of God to them... The Father’s love is available to all, in all places and at all times. The hope we have in Him will cause a man to return to his wife and become a husband. Will cause him to return to his children and become a father. Will cause him to return to his community and become an example, not a statistic,” says Lenty.

Regardless of your stance on faith and God, the time has come to shed light on the mindsets feeding money to the brothels, gentlemen’s clubs and dark street corners. The global climate says we must turn awareness raising on its head and target the demand side of the human trafficking issue.

Madlala-Routledge, head of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, recently wrote an open letter published in the Cape Times. “The demand for prostitution determines supply. A strong call by men not to buy sex would eliminate demand and therefore supply. Mr. President, South Africa must not become a pimp state.” Men are part of the solution.

Tonya Stanfield is the Director of Justice ACTs, a faith-based alliance working to combat human trafficking. This article is part of the GL Opinion and Commentary Service, produced as part of the Red Light 2010 Campaign to say no to human trafficking.

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