

The Local Face of Human Trafficking.....

July 8th, 2004, the US House Subcommittee on Human Rights and Wellness held a Hearing on Trafficking. One of the witnesses was Michele Clark, the co-director of The Protection Project, a human rights research institute located at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. The Protection Project focused on documenting and analyzing the complex dimensions of human trafficking in the United States and around the world.

In her testimony, Ms. Clark read a letter she had received from a trafficking victim that makes it clear that trafficking is not only an international problem, but a local problem as well.

Dear Michele:

I wanted to talk to you, to impress upon you that there are a lot of American women who are also in the same predicament [as women who are trafficked from overseas.] Pimps buy and sell women all the time, between themselves, the clients, etc. You can sell one white blonde girl in Mexico and get three Mexican girls in return. A girl who makes good money on the street can sell for \$10,000 or more to another pimp. Often, pimps make sure that they have sisters or friends, and split the girls up. If one acts up or tries to escape, the other will be punished.

I tell you these things from my own experience. I was bought and sold between men in the US. I am a white female, born here. My daughter was held hostage so that I could work. One year, I saw her for one day. My mother, who is now 77, was beaten several times because of me. I have seen many of my girlfriends killed. It is often easier to kill yourself than to know you will be tortured all night when you get home and are not able to sleep before you must go back to work. By torture, I mean beatings, strangling, being cut, thrown out of the windows, etc. I have been tossed out of a third story window. I have had 81 broken bones, including my nose being broken three times, my jaw fractured, my ribs have had 28 separate

breaks. I have had my feet broken so that I could not leave.

The “houses” in Vegas are used by pimps to train girls they do not want to deal with. They take girls there for months at a time. The girls are not allowed to leave without the pimp coming to get her. When he does, the house gives him her cash. They cannot keep money on them in the room. They are let out for a week or two at a time, the pimp spends some time with her, buys her clothes and such. Then the pimp signs the girls back in for another stint.

I know that trafficking is bad from other countries. I used to know Chinese restaurants and massage parlors in Phoenix that would bring girls in who only spoke Chinese. They were allowed to see only Chinese men. They were not allowed to talk to anyone else. They are not allowed out and are locked up when the owner of the store leaves. There are no phones, no way to communicate. I know this because I used to know a Chinese motel owner and his wife who were friends with the owner. He was over often and the wife would tell me how sad she was for the girls. But she could not say anything because of her husband. It goes on.

Just please do not forget the American girls. There are girls here who have no one to turn to either. They are exploited, abused, and used. They are bought and sold and beaten or raped by men, even their own, daily.

They need you too.