

**Statement for the Helsinki Commission**  
**Wednesday, September 25, 2006**  
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**(End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual**  
**Purposes-USA)**  
**[www.ecpatusa.org](http://www.ecpatusa.org)**

ECPAT-USA is the US branch of an international children's rights organization based in Bangkok. ECPAT began as a campaign in 1991 aimed at solving the problem of child sex tourism, that is, people who travel abroad to sexually exploit children, initially focused on four countries, Thailand, Taiwan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. In 1996 ECPAT changed its mission to the much broader one, ending all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children, including prostitution, pornography and trafficking.

When ECPAT was founded the campaign worked for three years in more than 20 countries to uncover the hidden world of commercial child sexual exploitation. The ECPAT files became filled with terrible stories, of trafficking, of pornography and of exploitation which have now become common knowledge. ECPAT's main focus was on lobbying to get legal changes which would give more protection to children in the original target countries. As ECPAT began to work more closely with international law enforcement groups, tourism agencies, and national NGOs it was increasingly clear that child commercial sexual exploitation could not be solved by any single nation working alone. As a result ECPAT convened a consultation of governments and NGOs in Bangkok in 1994. Out of the consultation came the recommendation that an international Congress was urgently needed so that governments could plan together measures which would end this widespread abuse of children. And it was out of that recommendation that the World Congress process was born.

The First and Second World Congresses were both sponsored by ECPAT International, UNICEF and the NGO Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. When the First World Congress took place ten years ago, most countries were just waking up to the fact that the world community had done little to confront a terrible form of child abuse.

The 122 countries that attended the First World Congress unanimously agreed to a Declaration and Plan of Action to address child commercial sexual exploitation both within their own countries and internationally. Many governments changed their laws to protect children and began programming for the preventive and protective services that need to be in place to protect all children's rights to grow up free of sexual exploitation. NGOs were a major part of the effort, lobbying for changes and working with

communities and with youth themselves to speak out and to plan and carry out child protective programs.

By the time the Second World Congress was held in Yokohama in 2001, the world was a different place. Not only was there a far wider level of consciousness in both government and civil society about the fact that children were being sexually exploited but there was an almost universal acceptance of the concept that children had special rights that needed to be protected in order for them to grow up as fully developed human beings. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was almost universally ratified.

The 136 countries in attendance at the Second World Congress recommitted themselves to the agreements made in Stockholm and pledged to continue their work to eradicate the commercial sexual exploitation of children in all its forms everywhere. While a lot of progress has been made, we still have a long way to go.

This Mid Term Reviews that have been taking place around the world over the last two years were part of the international effort to assess progress toward the goals set out in Stockholm and Yokohama. Mid Term Reviews have taken place in every region of the world by now, the one in the US being the final review. These reviews were planned as a way of identifying what has and has not been done in every country and every region to end the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Each review addressed the problem within a particular national or regional context.

In a world where borders are porous and technological advances have brought us all together into one global community it is not surprising that the results of most of many of the mid term reviews were similar to those results of the US Mid Term Review. We have heard in the many Mid Term Reviews about the need to increase attention to the demand side of child sexual exploitation, the exploiters who have been left off the hook until now. We have heard the need to increase vigilance about the internet and new technologies as entry points for child exploitation. In many places there is a need for more data and monitoring instruments so that we know how we are doing in the fight against child sexual exploitation, as we here in the U.S. need. Prevention education for both boys and girls, and greater intergovernmental and intersectoral cooperation were all refrains heard in other mid term reviews that were echoed in the United States.

In comparing and contrasting Mid Term Reviews around the world I would like to highlight just two areas of work that are often mentioned. In one of these areas I am proud so say that the US is clearly a leader. The other area is one in which I think we can do better.

1) In some regions there is a very strong need for additional and better legislation to protect children, to criminalize child sexual exploitation in all its forms including prostitution and pornography. I am proud to say that at the federal level the US is very strong and clear in setting out a legal framework for the protection of children. And while in some of our 50 states the legislation is not as consistent, it seems like there is

excellent momentum to right these wrongs in the next year or two. Dr. Mottar will speak in more detail about the laws.

2) In another area, the US, like so many other countries, is not yet successful in involving children and youth themselves in speaking out against child trafficking. While there are some excellent international examples here and there around the globe and in the United States, for the most part we are still all challenged by how to empower young people themselves to partner with us in speaking out.

The U.S. Mid Term Review represents an excellent benchmark for future work in the U.S. against sexual exploitation of children. It will help keep us focused on priority areas for our work. And it is a fair assessment for how the US is doing in its national efforts, to be presented to the Third World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.

I began working on this issue fifteen years ago, when one could not mention commercial sexual exploitation in most international forums. There was no national or international effort underway to overturn the sale marketing of children's bodies. We are in a completely different place today. Governments and intergovernmental organizations were not working on it. But the international community, governments, NGOs, intergovernmentals and good individuals all over the world came together, through the world congresses and other international meetings and put an end to the apathy.

Having worked with committed partners at the Protection Project of Johns Hopkins University and Shared Hope International, I am so gratified to feel the commitment of so many groups and individuals to protecting all our children from sexual exploitation. With this kind of energy and commitment, I think we are finally on the path to becoming a country to truly protect all children from the horrors of sexual exploitation.