

Hearing
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
U.S. Helsinki Commission

**Protecting Children: The Battle Against Child Pornography
and Other Forms of Sexual Exploitation**

Testimony
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Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, it is an honor to be here before you today. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) in America. I will summarize my comments and would like my full testimony, the complete report from the U.S. Mid-Term Review of Commercial Sexual Exploitation in America and video which I will be presenting as part of my testimony, submitted for the Congressional record. Chairman Brownback, you are a tireless advocate and champion for the protection of our nation's children, and I commend you and your colleagues for your leadership and initiative. Chairman Smith, your strong voice for those who cannot speak for themselves is admirable. Shared Hope International (SHI) joins you in concern for the safety and future of the most vulnerable members of our society, and I am honored to have the opportunity to present along with my colleagues the findings of this unprecedented the MTR has precedent, both in other countries and with the last regional one. I would choose a different word. mid-term review of America's efforts to combat this heinous crime.

For almost a decade, Shared Hope International has been committed to building the communities that restore and empower women and children who have been victimized by traffickers, gangs and pimps. We do this through our Homes of Hope. We currently have Homes of Hope in six countries and each restoration center includes a wide range of services such as residential facilities, addiction recovery, medical care and vocational and literacy training. The goal for each home is to provide safety and security for women and children to realize their own value and reintegrate into their culture. In addition to our restorative efforts, we have worked on preventative measures to impede those that would buy or sell an individual in the sex trade for profit. Shared Hope created the PREDATOR PROJECT as part of an international movement to identify traffickers and their victims. This was done in collaboration with local law enforcement, local government officials and public disclosure. So far, the PREDATOR PROJECT has been conducted in more than 14 countries identified as chief places of origin, transit or destination of global

trafficking. We have captured over 150 hours of interviews of predators and their victims, presented evidence to both governmental and non-governmental officials in more than 10 countries around the world and assisted in the increase of laws of prosecution and greater services for victims in more than six countries.

This past year, Shared Hope extended the Predator Project into the United States, as part of an international project to identify how commercial sex markets work from a demand standpoint. Our field research was conducted in U.S. cities known to be hot spots for sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. Our findings from the research were compelling enough that when it was suggested that we spearhead the U.S. Mid-Term Review on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in America, it decidedly became a necessary extension of a next steps strategy to further protect our nation's children against sexual predators.

The original impetus for a Mid-Term Review came from delegates of the Yokohama Congress who believed that a country specific process would not only promote learning and refinement of local implementation strategies, but would also support an active dialogue on issues of commercial sexual exploitation of children before the next World Congress to be held by the end of 2007. My colleague Carol Smolenski Executive Director of ECPAT USA, will tell you more about the history and future goals of the World Congress. And my colleague Dr. Mohamed Mattar of the Protection Project will present a brief legal analysis from the CSEC Mid-Term Review of ways to strengthen child protection legislation.

Because of dedicated organizations, key government officials and concerned law enforcement, the US has set precedence around the world by strengthening legislation, sentencing traffickers and providing amnesty to survivors. Some of these efforts include the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), a landmark legislation which launched America into the fight against the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005 (TVPRA) further strengthens states' programs to prosecute child prostitution and further educate the public on this issue. Other key legislation includes The PROTECT Act of 2003, which expands territorial jurisdiction to American sex offenders abroad, the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006, which increases penalties for child sex offenders, and the ratification of both the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children and the Optional Protocol on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

These crucial legislative measures aggressively confirm the commitment of the United States Congress and Executive Office to stop those criminals who seek to exploit our children through the commercial sex trade. The American communities of child protection advocates from the federal government to NGOs, from local law enforcement to the private sector, have rallied in support of this progressive and effective legislation.

However, current statistics and stories from survivors indicate that our work is far from complete, especially as it concerns domestic children who are commercially sexually

exploited through prostitution and pornography primarily, but who are then either misidentified as delinquent children and simply sent home or to state child welfare systems with the belief that they will be provided services through the state's foster care system.

The efforts of all those here at this hearing demonstrates to me a serious and bold commitment to find collaborative ways to strengthen the government, nongovernmental and business involvement both in protecting vulnerable victims and raising awareness that would challenge *individuals and societies* to take responsibility for their own members who are buying our children for sex.

In a moment, I want to share with you a video which demonstrates the reality of the market places of victimization here in the United States as part of Shared Hope's Predator Project. What you will see is by no means a comprehensive look at this point, but provides a sampling of what we found in places like Atlanta, Las Vegas, Seattle, Las Angeles, and Washington, DC on the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

The footage in this video was obtained by an independent veteran researcher in the field of sex-trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children, whom we have been fortunate enough to work with. These clips have been turned into the proper legal authorities for further investigation.

The first clip is of "Amy". She was orphaned around the age of 11 and then made her way to Atlanta from Michigan by the age of 15 and began working in strip clubs soon thereafter. At the time of this interview, only a few months ago, she is 16 and living out of a hotel along a truck stop area, being prostituted by a pimp and dancing in a strip club where she also engages men for sex in the VIP room. "Marcus" is not "Amy's" pimp, but is a facilitator within the network and is selling "Amy" to a potential buyer. The profit is split between "Marcus" and "Amy's" primary pimp.

The second clip is of "Amanda" who is also 16 and lives at a hotel in a truck stop area, on the city's parameters. She is also being pimped. You will notice the enablement of hotel security officials and the hotel staff as she proceeds to check in a buyer to bring to her room. A local police officer reported to us that "Amanda" had been arrested numerous times. Due to a lack of a secured facility or shelter, "Amanda" has gone back into the commercial sex trade repeatedly and is the victim of a vicious cycle of exploitation.

Last is a clip of a German man in Atlanta revising his escort service website and showing the researcher the ease of how to set one up. He cites the number of site visitations in just one month at 5 million. We know from our research, that this highly unregulated portion of the sex industry, utilizes minors like "Amy" and "Amanda" as part of its product line. It is important to note, that within only a few months from obtaining this footage, the website web address given the investigator was taken down and replaced with another web address, a common practice for escort services in order to remain elusive to authorities.

(I ASK THAT AT THIS POINT ANY AUDIO OR VISUAL EQUIPMENT BE TURNED OFF.)

START VIDEO

While the movement to combat CSEC continues to take momentum around the world, I firmly believe we must ensure that those victimized are treated with utmost dignity and with a long-term view for their restoration. I know through our work worldwide that a young girl or boy who is offered hope will in fact become a survivor and often become the leaders who will bring about long-term change. At the same time, we must not allow this focus on the dignity of the victimized to limit our outlook on the nature of the crime. I have come to use the terminology “market places of victimization” because the environment for which commercial sexual exploitation of children thrives is a market.

As we look to the future in our next steps to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children, we must address these issues from both points of supply and demand to be effective. To date the United State’s efforts have had a very important and needed focus on supply, including public education, prevention, and restoration programs for at-risk child victims. Increasingly, government officials and advocates around the world are striving to shift the lens from the victim to the victimizer, from the vulnerability of populations to traffickers to the ease of access of the buyer, who we know now is not simply a seedy pedophile, but an ordinary man– our father, our brother, our uncle – being marketed to by a very savvy industry.

While the subject of supply and demand is not usually considered a separate category of CSEC, this was a decided focus within the Mid-Term Review as it was timely and vital in order to facilitate further discussion among child protectors within the U.S. and with the international community. Since the commercial sale of children takes place within a marketplace structure, the components of supply and demand must be understood in order to eventually reduce both within that marketplace. Supply is caused by the conditions of vulnerability and availability of children, including poverty, physical or sexual abuse, neglect, homelessness, and emotional coercion. Demand is created by the consumers of commercial sexual services and by the pimps and traffickers who profit from the sale of children. Demand is a major issue of the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

In order to address the crisis of demand, Shared Hope International created The Defenders, a domestically-focused preventative program which targets males who are current or potential consumers of pornography and child pornography. The Defenders aims to reveal the link between pornography and demand through public education and awareness. This program has a nation-wide base of more than 1200 men actively working to reduce demand.

In closing, the U.S. Mid-Term Review on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in America identified five key issues, which stand out as the most immediate

and urgent needs to protect America's children. I will highlight the issues and then allow my colleagues to further explain.

- Lack of programs focusing on demand- Lack of programs focusing on demand was one of the greatest gaps and most urgent issues to be addressed in order to successfully combat CSEC in the U.S. Demand for sexual services of children is the basis for the increasing crisis of victimized youth in America and must be addressed through both prevention and prosecution.
- Growth of on-line child pornography – The growth of on-line child pornography in U.S. addressed as catalyst for the rise in demand for child victims. Child pornography is gateway to further child sexual exploitation through trafficking, prostitution and sex tourism.
- Resources – A lack of available resources at the local level targeted towards effective and secure services for victims, especially physical shelter.
- Cooperation – Need for continued and improved cooperation between local law enforcement, NGOs and the federal government.
- Continued legislative focus - Continued legislative growth is necessary focusing on the protection of, and appropriate services for child victims. Including:
 - decriminalizing exploited minors
 - reforming state CPS policies & practices
 - state age of consent laws more consistent with federal anti-trafficking
 - developing right to residential shelter legislation for victims
 - reform laws and enforcement policies to facilitate prosecution of adult exploiters

Through the exploitative vehicles of child pornography, prostitution, sex tourism and sex trafficking, demand is being fueled, requiring younger and younger, more inexperienced product. Evidence also shows strong links between each of the vehicles of exploitation. Legal pornographic websites link to illegal images of child exploitation, and pornographic images of children create demand for direct sexual contact with child victims.

Perhaps what challenges us the most is helping to re-shape the culture and the language of our society which has allowed for the flourishing of victimization of vulnerable children.

Our goal with these findings is to bring greater awareness to the public at large, more support to social services providers including long-term care/shelters and stronger laws that bring justice to the victimized.

Legal action, domestic and international, and strong movements have made amazing impact on the way we identify and treat victims. Today we are here to remove the veil

and present how these changes are being and can be applied, how they affect the victimizer and those victimized.

Mr. Chairmen, members of the committee, on behalf of these children and the thousands more whose stories we will never hear, we urge you to take aggressive action to protect our nation's children, providing them with the safety to live and to grow and to follow their dreams.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you our findings on this important issue.

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