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FIGHTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM: NEW CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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Russell Senate Office Building
Room 485

Carol Smolenski, Executive Director, ECPAT-USA

Twenty-seven years ago, ECPAT began advocating for the protection of children from exploitation in the context of travel and tourism—a time when no one was talking about it. I am proud to say that we’ve seen tremendous progress since then.

Our first success was in 1994, when we worked to pass extra-territoriality laws that ensure US citizens traveling abroad and sexually abusing children in their destinations can be prosecuted in the United States. The law was significantly strengthened in 2003. This month, a Florida man, named David Lynch, was sentenced to **330 years** in prison under these laws for exploiting several children in the Philippines.

The other big success has been the expansion of the Tourism Child Protection Code of Conduct. The Code was created by ECPAT in 1998 and introduced in North America in 2004. The Code is six voluntary steps that companies take to protect children from sexual exploitation. We launched The Code along side Carlson Companies. It took several years for other companies to follow suit but we are pleased that in 2011 Wyndham and Hilton both signed the Code.

Today, **every** large U.S. hotel chain has signed The Code: Besides the three mentioned above the others are Marriott, Choice, and Hyatt. These are six out of the 10 largest hotel chains in the world. Two of the largest domestic air carriers, American Airlines and Delta Air Lines have also signed The Code.

One of the most important steps of The Code is staff training. Let me tell you a story about Benjamin, a hotel security director from Massachusetts. His hotel is so well trained that the minute a trafficker entered his property, they implemented their protocol, and his whole team knew what to do. Raymond, the head of an international trafficking ring, who was later found to have sold children at **400 hotels** before getting to Massachusetts, tried his luck at Ben's hotel but he was stopped in his tracks. He brought two children to Ben's hotel but instead of being abused, they were identified. And instead of Raymond walking free, he was sentenced to the maximum penalty of 30 years in prison.

Spreading the word to hotel associates is crucial. In 2016, ECPAT-USA partnered with Marriott to expand online human trafficking training for their associates. The training is available through the American Hotel and Lodging Association and used by hotel brands across the industry. Marriott-branded hotels trained over 335,000 associates within 15 months of requiring the training. Imagine if all US hotel brands required training.

According to a 2017 nationwide survey of hotels initiated by ECPAT-USA and carried out by New York University Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, over half of U.S. hotels are trained to help prevent child sex trafficking. This is a tremendous development. ECPAT-USA's full report about the impact of our work with the US hotel industry, "No Vacancy for Child Sex Traffickers," is on our website.

While we have come so far, there is still a long way to go. In 2016, ECPAT published the results of a two-year Global Study on the Exploitation of Children in the Context of Travel and Tourism. The study's 47 recommendations set the stage for the next phase of our work.

I am sharing copies of the executive summary and recommendations with you. One of the important recommendations calls for **all** businesses to ensure that corporate travel takes place with travel companies that adopt child protection policies, train and join ECPAT's Code of Conduct. We are delighted about the new provisions introduced as part of the TVPRA by Congressman Smith, which call for U.S. federal employees to travel with companies incorporating anti-trafficking policies and training.

In addition, we are developing a new training for companies that manage corporate travel and events, supported by Carlson Wagonlit Travel and Maritz Travel, that will bring this information to travel managers at companies across the entire private sector, not just the travel industry. These efforts will save lives.

We met Jenny, a travel manager for a finance company who went to a client convention in Mexico hosted by Maritz Travel. There was an awareness session about human trafficking because business travelers may spot human

trafficking in their travels. Jenny attended the session and at the airport on the way home she saw a woman with a plastic bag as luggage, she was disheveled— indicators from her session the day before— and something about the situation didn't sit right with Jenny so she reported her suspicions. And she was right—the girl she saw was a human trafficking victim and she was rescued because of Jenny.

Of course, the sexual exploitation of children happens outside of the travel and tourism context. One of the fastest growing areas children are exploited is through the production of child sexual abuse imagery (commonly called child pornography). Most people are not aware of A. The vast extent of this problem: The Cyber Tipline received over 10.2 million reports in 2017. B. The young age of the children: The Internet Watch Foundation reported that 55% of the images were children 10 years or younger. And C. The violence depicted. Content showing the rape and sexual torture of children, is up this year by 5%, from 28% of all content to 33%.

Soon, ECPAT-USA will issue a report with recommendations that include stronger background checks for anyone who comes in contact with children and more oversight of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, which registers website names, among others. It is a complex and growing industry that needs a range of responses including government regulations and oversight.

As we talk about our legislative priorities, let me thank all of the offices here on the House side that were involved in the successful passage of FOSTA-SESTA legislation. It was a hard won victory, and we appreciate your offices leading the charge in spite of opposition from the tech industry.

Secondly Allison and many of your offices have been instrumental in moving along TVPA reauthorization. The House-passed bill was particularly strong and made a number of adjustments that ECPAT supports. We understand that we are very close to a final conference agreement, and we look forward to endorsing a final bill that will be sent to the President.

We have made great strides in the protection of children from sexual exploitation in travel and tourism. But as the problem of child exploitation constantly adapts to a changing world, moving off the streets and going online, going behind the doors of private residences, we have to be ever more adept at responding. We cannot lag behind the abusers and traffickers who spend every minute figuring out ways to get around laws, we have to work faster, we have to work smarter.

The travel industry is one of the biggest industries in the world, which is a means for exploitation to take place. But the good news is that one of the biggest

industries in the world is mobilizing to stop it. I am looking forward to working with all of you to continue the fight.