

JUST Notes
SPECIAL ISSUE ON
The Exploitation of Children
On the San Diego/Tijuana Border
June, 2009

We promise to stand with people who are poor by seeking out and addressing critical needs, particularly in those places where our presence could make a difference and by working with others to alleviate conditions of poverty and oppression.

- *Promise Chapter 2006*
Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange

EARTH CHARTER -- PRINCIPLE III. Social and Economic Justice

9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.

11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.

a. Secure the human rights of women and girls and end all violence against them.

12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.

a. Eliminate discrimination in all its forms, such as that based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, language, and national, ethnic or social origin.

b. Affirm the right of indigenous peoples to their spirituality, knowledge, lands and resources and to their related practice of sustainable livelihoods.

c. Honor and support the young people of our communities, enabling them to fulfill their essential role in creating sustainable societies

NOTE:

If you have no time to read the entire JUST Notes, click on the following link to watch “Invisible Chains” and learn about the children being sexually exploited in San Diego and Tijuana.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAQW7N968PA>

Trafficking of children would not exist without demand. Often, demand for child prostitution is local, supported (if only implicitly) by social attitudes and cultural practices. But sex tourism also feeds the demand for **Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**. Three million children in Africa, Asia, Central Europe, and Latin America are victims of tourists who travel internationally, regionally, or domestically to sexually exploit children. Sexual exploitation of children violates their basic human rights, dignity, and the image of God in every person. CSEC involves physical abuse, assault, deprivation, and rape which cause serious physical damage including sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, forced abortions, and other injuries, including death. CSEC also causes devastating emotional damage ranging from trauma, depression, shame, and post-traumatic stress to severe psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, suicide, and sexual abuse by the child herself. – Adapted from UNICEF

FACTS

U.S.

Everyday over 1.4 million teens are homeless or runaways and vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Each year 5,000 teens will lose their lives on the streets due to assault, rape, suicide and illness.

Up to 300,000 children in the U.S. are at risk of falling prey to the sex trade each year

A child is propositioned for sex within the first 72 hours that she/he is on the streets.

– Adapted from San Diego Youth and Community Services

SAN DIEGO-TIJUANA BORDER

- At any given time there are up to 2000 homeless and runaway children in San Diego County.

- According to DIF and UNICEF, over 1,000 children are commercially sexually exploited annually in Tijuana.
- The United Nations lists Mexico as the No.1 supplier of young children in North America.
- The San Diego-Tijuana border is the busiest international border in the world. Amidst all of its day-to-day traffic, the trafficking of children for commercial sexual exploitation runs rampant on both sides.
- A recent study released by the University of Pennsylvania estimates that 300 – 400,000 children in the U.S. are victims of the sex trade. It is believed that a significant number of these children are trafficked through the Tijuana and San Diego border.

– Adapted from *San Diego Youth and Community Services*
- Like guns and drugs are trafficked through the San Diego-Tijuana border, so are children. San Diego's proximity to the Mexican border, its coastal, tourist appeal as well as its military bases is believed to be some reasons for the high incidence of child exploitation.
- In the early nineties, hundreds of trans-border boys from Mexico and Central America, some as young as ten, crossed through the San Diego-Tijuana border to be lured by local gangs into child prostitution in Balboa Park and downtown San Diego. Some children reported that they engaged in "survival sex" just to have a warm meal or a place to sleep for the night.
- According to the San Diego Youth & Community Services (SDYCS) shelter staff, young boys reported that pedophiles, which the kids called "chenchos" or "uncles," would claim to "adopt" them and promised to take care of them in exchange for sexual favors.
- In 2003, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) identified San Diego as a "High Intensity Child Prostitution Area (HICPA)." At any given time, girls as young as 13 can be seen walking down the City of San Diego's El Cajon Boulevard or listed on websites like "My Space" or "Craig's List."
- Local street gangs coerce children into prostitution on the Internet, escort agencies and on the streets as well as transporting American girls to Tijuana's red-light district to exploit them.
- American girls as young as 12 have been prostituted on National City Boulevard and El Cajon Boulevard in San Diego.
- Homeless, runaway and thrown-away children in San Diego have reported to the SDYCS shelter staff that they have been propositioned to travel to major cities like Los Angeles, Phoenix and Las Vegas to engage in prostitution or pornography.
- The exploitation of children is also pervasive on Mexico's side of the border. International children's rights groups report that tens of thousands of Americans travel abroad every year to pay for sex with children.
- Americans comprise the largest number of sex tourists in the world. Thousands of these sex tourists choose Mexico as their preferred place of destination.
- Human trafficking is also a global phenomenon that transcends other international borders. The U.S. State Department estimates that each year 600,000 to 800,000 people, primarily women and children, are trafficked across world borders. Approximately 17,500 of these victims are brought into the U.S. through our borders every year. Victims are abducted or lured by promises of a better life and are forced or coerced to work in slave-like conditions in commercial sex, domestic servitude or other forms of labor or service.
- To date, drug trafficking remains the largest form of organized crime in the world while the illegal arms trade follows in second place. Only a couple of years ago, human trafficking ranked third place as the largest form of organized crime. According to the U.S. Department of Justice,

trafficking in persons is now tied in second place with the sale of illegal arms making it the fastest growing form of organized crime in the world. Some anti-trafficking experts predict that based on this exponential growth, within ten years, the profits generated from human trafficking will have caught up to those generated by the sale of illegal drugs.

- Around the world, human trafficking is becoming more appealing to traffickers because many countries either have no laws against trafficking or fail to enforce their existing laws. In the U.S., sex trafficking is especially appealing to organized criminal syndicates because there is a large, lucrative sex industry fueled by a strong demand for paid sex.
- While Mexico is primarily a country of transit, the U.S. is mainly a country of destination that receives victims from over forty-nine countries around the world. Domestically, cases have been investigated in at least forty-eight states.
- Trafficking has also become appealing to organized criminal networks because they have learned that a child who is forced to work at a brothel can be used over and over making it relatively easy for a brothel to earn tens of thousands of dollars a year with only a few child prostitutes. Compared to the sale of drugs or weapons, which after consumption or a point of sale leaves no opportunity for further profit—the bottom line is clear.
- At La Zona Norte, Tijuana's red-light district, bar owners auctioned young girls as if they were live stock. In high heels and flamboyant, skimpy clothes, hundreds of girls lined themselves across several blocks of what appeared to be a fast food chain of exploited children. They hide their child-like faces behind red lipstick and cheap make-up to give the illusion that they were older.
- Merchant women sell provocative clothing to the young girls. Taco stands, local stores, shoeshine men and taxi drivers all benefit economically at the children's expense. An entire community turns a blind eye to the children's exploitation because of the huge profits generated by the sex tourism industry.
- There are websites and American adult magazines that blatantly advertise sex tours to Tijuana. In these tours sex customers can go on line and purchase a \$3-4,000 /12-day sex package and can enjoy "all the sex you can have," including a limousine ride from the San Diego airport to Rosarito or Ensenada. Although many of these businesses advertise that they do not supply children, it is a known fact that child exploitation happens in many of these establishments when the price is right.
- Every year, thousands of vulnerable, young girls are lured and transported to places like La Zona to be prostituted according to Stolen Childhood, a recent child exploitation study conducted in several major cities in Mexico. The report confirmed that each year, an estimated 16,000 Mexican and Central American children fall prey to organized child sex tourism in cities of Mexico. Most of them are recruited or kidnapped from poor, rural regions.
- The owners and operators of the sex industry know that their customers have an affinity for young girls and that they are willing to pay hundreds and sometimes thousands of dollars when children are especially young.
- Due to a seemingly endless number of sex customers, the sex industry is challenged with meeting the high demand for fresh, young and new faces. Since the demand is ever growing, the need for sex traffickers to effectively supply the sex industry with children is critical. In short, the supply cannot keep up with the demand.
- Child trafficking and organized child sex tourism are so linked to corruption in Mexico that forged documents are readily obtained and government support or at least apathy is easily bought by business owners in Tijuana's sex industry.

-- Adapted from Manolo Guillén, Program Manager for the B-SAFE Project

PRAYER FOR CHILDREN

Liberator Lord, you came to set us free from all forms of slavery and to heal us into freedom. Let us remember those who have suffered from slavery and the millions who still suffer as slaves.

We pray for Raj, in Bangladesh, whose family sold him into slavery at 10 because the younger children were starving and they needed to buy rice.

We pray for Victoria, 17, from Moldova, forced into debt slavery in Bosnia and put to work as a prostitute.

We pray for 14-year-old Jonah from Sierra Leone who was enslaved by the military when he was ten.

We pray for Julia Gabriel, 19, smuggled from Mexico to find a better future in the U.S., only to be forced to pick crops under armed guard in South Carolina for 12 - 14 hours a day.

We pray for Mai, 27, a new mother, who was separated from her baby and forced to work on roads in Burma.

We pray for all your children who have suffered the injustice of slavery.

We know, Lord, that you have created human beings with dignity and that slavery is a horrible injustice. Empower us, who are not enslaved, to fight for the rights of those who are. Help us to pray and empower us in action to free your enslaved children. Liberator Lord, hear us, help us, and set your children free through us. Amen.

– *Education for Justice*

TAKE ACTION

- **Take action** by helping pass a bill to appropriate funds for human trafficking victims <http://www.actioncenter.polarisproject.org/component/content/article/522>
- Other bills to take action on <http://actioncenter.polarisproject.org/>
- **Be watchful.** If you notice any suspicious activity, report it. National Hotline 888.3737.888
- **Report** a child sex tourist operation.predator@DHS.gov or call the ICE hotline: 1-866-347-2423
- **Learn more** about child sex tourism. Watch “The Dark Side of Cancun” online. <http://www.thedarksideofcancun.com/>
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WHAT IS BEING DONE?

- Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition <http://www.bsccoalition.org/Programs%20and%20Projects.html>
- Children of the Night - assisting children between the ages of 11 and 17 <http://www.childrenofthenight.org/home.html>
- Coalition to Abolish Traffic and Slavery <http://www.castla.org/>
- Orange County Task Force on Human Trafficking <http://www.ochumantrafficking.org/>
- San Diego Youth Services <http://www.sdyouthservices.org/site/PageServer?pagename=home>
- Toussaint Academy for homeless teens <http://www.toussaintacademy.org/about/about.html>
- World Vision’s Prevention Project http://www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/learn/globalissues-stp?Open&lid=cstp&lpos=day:txt:read_more

ADDITIONAL WEBSITES

- Casa Cornelia <http://www.casacornelia.org/>
- Center for Young Women’s Development www.cywd.org
- Free the Slaves <http://www.freetheslaves.net/Page.aspx?pid=183>
- Libertad Latina <http://www.libertadlatina.org/Index.htm>
- Project Rescue <http://www.projectrescue.com/>
- San Diego Action Network <http://www.actionnetworksd.org/index.html>
- The Child Trafficking Resource Project <http://thectrp.wordpress.com/social-services/>
- UNICEF http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_exploitation.html