



HUMAN TRAFFICKING WORKING GROUP

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NEWS REPORT

Headline	Thai sex workers were slaves: court
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Related reports	April 22, 2009: Thai sex workers 'were \$5 slaves' April 22, 2009: Thai sex industry imports 'traded, possessed and used for profit'

Five Thai women brought to Australia under a sex slave scheme were told they had to work off debts of up to \$90,000, a Melbourne court has heard.

Kam Tin Ho, his brother Ho Kam Ho, Chee Fui Hoo and Slamet Edy Rahardjo are accused of being involved in the well planned and sophisticated scheme, the Victorian Supreme Court has heard.

Opening the trial, crown prosecutor Daniel Gurvich told the jury the scheme involved bringing the women to Australia and profiting from their willingness to work for minimum reward in the local sex industry. The five women came to Australia in 2003 and 2004 knowing they would work in the sex industry. Many had previously worked as prostitutes, he said. Mr Gurvich said one of the women never actually worked in Australia but conditions endured by the other four while working as sex workers in Melbourne amounted to slavery.

"They had to pay a price to secure their journey to Australia and the opportunity to earn money to assist their families back in Thailand," he said.

"That price was a contract, a contract to incur a debt that meant that before they could earn money of their own to keep, they would be required to service a specified number of clients."

Mr Gurvich said that under "highly exploitative" contracts, some of the women had to service between 650 and 750 clients to pay a debt of \$80,000 to \$90,000 each, which would typically take three or four months to pay. While under contract, the women got to keep \$5 from the \$125 clients paid for sex. Another \$50 would go towards their debt. They worked six days and if they worked a seventh, they could keep \$50 from each job. Once they paid their debt they could keep \$50 a job. The women sent the money they earned back to their families in Thailand.

Mr Gurvich said the women mainly worked at two South Melbourne brothels and lived in houses in Melbourne's CBD and suburban Mt Waverley and Ashburton. While under contract, they were generally not allowed to go out without company, their passports were withheld, they were transported between brothels and home and did not have a key to their house. Even after they had paid their debt, the women were still under strict control, he said.

The court heard the accused were concerned with preventing Australian immigration authorities from deporting the women, because this would reduce the scheme's profits. It heard the women were brought into Australia on business or tourist visas based on false stories and tried to extend their stay by falsely claiming they were fleeing persecution. The accused have pleaded not guilty to the various charges.

Kam Tin Ho faces 14 counts including five of intentionally possessing a slave and one of entering into commercial transaction involving a slave. Ho Kam Ho faces 11 counts including four counts of intentionally possessing a slave and one of entering into commercial transaction involving a slave. Chee Fui Hoo faces two counts of intentionally possessing a slave and one of intentionally exercising over a slave a power attaching to the right of ownership. Slamet Edy Rahardjo faces one count of enter into commercial transaction involving a slave.

The trial continues on Thursday.

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