



HUMAN TRAFFICKING WORKING GROUP

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NEWS REPORT

Headline	So far, so good, but more can be done to end sex slavery
Reported in	The Age
Date of publication	18 June 2009
Place of publication	Melbourne
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Sixty years ago, the international community took an absolute stand against an ancient practice when in Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights it said: "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude." This week, the Federal Government has taken us one step closer towards realising this aim. For many people, the word slave conjures up images of the trans-Atlantic slave trade of old. Recently, however, it became clear that Australia had a slave trade of its own, hidden where few of us go - in brothels.

Women brought to Australia were being forced to become prostitutes, to perform specific sexual acts, including sex without a condom. These women were told they were on contract, and had to repay debts of up to \$50,000. The fact that the contracts were illegal and the debts imaginary didn't change the brutality with which they were enforced. Last year, 10 trafficked women described being in slavery in Australia like this: "We were made to feel like animals. Some of the customers were crazy ... We were sexually abused, we were dragged, we were hit ... It was like we were in jail . we had no free time, we couldn't go anywhere . . . It felt like we survived and died at the same time ..."

Up until 2003, women found without work permits in brothels were deported, including those who told police or immigration authorities about the crimes committed against them. The Howard government then stopped the mandatory detention and deportation of trafficked women, beefed up the Australian Federal Police's capacity to prosecute sex slave traders, strengthened the law on trafficking, brought in a support scheme for victims and gave victims access to a variety of residency visas. The changes made a difference. Some women were given support to help them recover from the violence they had experienced, prosecutions went ahead, and last year, in a groundbreaking case, the High Court found a brothel owner guilty of slavery.

However, significant problems with the visa system remained. Visas were contingent on women making a "significant contribution" to police investigations. This ignored the fact that often women didn't have enough information to help a prosecution, and that many women feared retribution from the traffickers, including against their families in their home countries.

Further, a promised 30-day "reflection period" that in Europe was used to give women time and information to decide what to do became, through regulation, only a few days, and women who didn't feel safe to help police were again threatened with deportation. Finally, the visas were initially temporary, leaving women in an ongoing state of uncertainty.

On Tuesday, the Minister for the Status of Women, Tanya Plibersek, announced changes to this, recognising Australia's responsibility to help women recover in this country from crimes committed against them here. A genuine reflection period has been introduced, the temporary trafficking witness protection visa has been abolished, and the permanent trafficking protection visa changed so it is available to all women, not just to those who make a "significant contribution" to investigations.

Where women's families are at risk because women have helped police, they will be eligible to come to Australia. A complementary visa system will also be established for women too scared to help police. All victims of slavery will be given support. Properly implemented, these changes will liberate trafficked women from fear and suffering. The Government is to be commended for acting for a group of women without a vote, and often without a voice. Three further steps would move us even closer to eliminating the crime.

First, we need to provide financial compensation for women through a federal scheme. Second, sexual slavery should be fully integrated into the Federal Government's work to prevent violence against women and children. Sexual slavery is a profound form of male

violence. Reducing it should go hand in hand with tackling family violence and sexual assault.

Finally, building on the previous step, we must move from looking at supply to investigating demand. Without men willing to pay to have sex with trafficked women, slavery wouldn't pay off for traffickers. We need to change men's attitudes so that sex with a woman in slavery is unthinkable.

Kathleen Maltzahn wrote *Trafficked*, the first book-length account of the trafficking of women for prostitution in Australia. She is chair of Project Respect, Australia's leading anti-sexual slavery organisation.

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