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Female prostitution, traffic of women, poverty and the countries' economic policies are all closely related subjects. The exchange of goods and services on which world economy is based leads to the most unimaginable things becoming potential objects of consumption. The living conditions of the financially least-advantaged sectors give rise to marked vulnerability, where values are distorted. This in turn leads to trade or traffic of varied merchandise taking place within a legal or illegal framework.

The scope of globalization of the economy can be seen not only in state policies at international level or in guidelines given by organizations such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank or in the decisive nature taken on by the participation of large transnational firms, but also in the nefarious influence of organized international crime and the mafia.

The division between developed countries in the First World and developing countries in the Third World has become much more obvious since the initiation of attempts to match the costs between one hemisphere and the other. Because of the policies for structural adjustment, the Southern Hemisphere has found itself obliged to adjust itself to standards imposed by the North, in conformity with objectives for globalization –which is nothing but unipolarization.

Households headed by women and those with dependent children are more vulnerable. As a consequence the number of street children, unprotected children and children at risk has gradually increased to astonishing levels. Poverty appears as the basic cause of lack of protection, life in the streets, under-privilege, family de-structuring and prostitution, though it is not exclusive to poor and underprivileged sectors, and there are other determining factors, such as consumerism, pressure to succeed, abuse of power and mainly gender discrimination.

From this situation, the sex trade has flourished and reached considerable proportions at various levels. The more marked conception of the assumption that «sex sells» can be seen at all levels, from sexist advertising to the traffic of people, through pornography, erotic phone calls, call-girls and hostesses, sexually provocative shows – strip-tease or sex-shows – mail-order brides, street prostitution, or in clandestine or illegal brothels, massage parlors, visits to collective groups of men – such as soldiers or oil-field or plantation workers – sexual tourism and other forms of trade in sex.

GLOBALIZATION OF SEX TRADE

Sexual exploitation of girls, boys and adolescents can be seen in each of the forms mentioned above as well as in others that the picturesque sex trade world continues to create. The association between trade in sex of adults and that of minors is notorious. Many women practicing prostitution state that they were prostituted or sexually abused from childhood on.

TOURISM AS A STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

Many governments around the world see international tourism as a form of economic growth. This sells hope to certain sectors of the population, encouraging them to migrate towards tourist areas where there are greater possibilities of earning income and helping their families.

In the formal sector, the nature of tourism promotes employment of young people in jobs requiring human resources that normally excludes the participation of older people and women in favor of young people, skilled workers or urban dwellers having a certain degree of instruction. Considering reductions in spending on programs for social assistance and services, many women and children are forced to seek employment in the informal sector of tourism (e.g. prostitution, tourist guides, drug selling, street selling of sweets, shoe-shining, flower vendors, etc.).

In many of the developing countries, informal sector tourism is inseparable from the sex trade industry of women and children. Sex tourism is based on networks that provide services such as tourist guides, prostitutes, brothels, massage parlors, that serve not only foreign sex tourists but local customers as well. Many people are attracted towards this environment because of the possibility of obtaining money through these activities that do not require any special skill but where the work tool is the body itself. In the case of boys and girls and adolescents, those who are not prostituted are exposed to crime and exploitation. Child labor exists around the world and, for many minors, tourism is always the «easy» option, preferred to more restrictive jobs as domestic work or «physical labor». Tourism in countries of the Third World is considered to be cheap vis-à-vis other holiday places. Low salaries and devaluated currency, the strategies of

the programs for structural adjustment imposed on developing countries to promote foreign investment and reduce spending on imports mean that many tourist resorts are provided with all the services and luxuries that could be desired. In this way, although they are not expensive for the foreign tourists visiting them, they are not within the reach of the local community. This only goes to strengthen the disparity and polarization between the hosts and the visitors.

Average people in industrialized countries do not have the possibility of staying at luxury hotels or have the standard of living in their own country that they seek in tourist resorts such as Thailand, Indonesia, Kenya, Sri Lanka or the Caribbean.

Minors are attracted to entering the area of sex tourism because they see the comparative wealth and consumerism of foreign tourists. Tourism is not the cause of the sexual exploitation of minors, but it does provide easy access to vulnerable children.

SEXUAL REGIONALIZATION

Latin America increasingly appears to be an attractive destination for sex tourists. Preconceived images of Latin women have disseminated the idea that «they are full of sexual energy» or that «they only think about sex». The zones with the greatest affluence of tourists of this type are Brazil and the Caribbean countries.

Street prostitution may be seen in Recife, Brazil, where women are also exploited in massage parlors and clubs. Adult prostitutes emphasize that tourists prefer younger girls. Many girls only work to help out their families. A very successful cartel of business and political interests has been identified in Rio as controlling around one thousand girls of between 8 and 15 years of age. The adolescents use adult identity documents to avoid problems with the police.

In Colombia, research in the center of Bogota pointed to the fact that the number of child prostitutes in the streets of the city had increased fivefold over the past seven years. In 1995, the police discovered 52 girls of between 10 and 12 years of age working as prostitutes in the capital city. While some of them had become prostitutes of their own will, others had been forced to do so. Many of them were drugged.

In 1990, there were around 60,000 girls of between 7 and 18 living in the city streets in the Dominican Republic. They had all been exploited, sexually abused, prostituted or used for pornography. A recent report for Defense for Children denounced companies operating with older men who like watching these “products”. The girls are offered for «enjoyment» and taken to a condominium. This is part of services to be chosen in a tourist holiday package.

In Haiti, sex between adult male tourists from the United States and children from the locality has been part of the activities of the sex industry for many years.

Africa is a cause of priority concern over the urgent need to protect human rights. Civil confrontation, the lack of food and housing of millions of people and refugee problems are deriving in various other forms of exploitation besides sexual exploitation.

Many countries find themselves with increasing problems of prostitution, due to poverty, migration from rural areas to urban centers and the advent of tourism. The tourist connection is exemplified in the situation of Senegal. In Zimbabwe, the problem is related with trade in sex near the border. Sudan, Kenya and Libya are on the road towards the same situation. It has been reported that Algeria is a stopping place for traffickers. In Mauritania, there is talk about the presence of foreign pedophiles and an increase in the number of boy prostitutes. In Ghana adolescents become prostitutes, thinking that they are going to get jobs as maids. The number of girls and boys that are sexually exploited in the Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso has increased notoriously.

In Mozambique, agencies have accused the United States peace-keeping forces of sexually exploiting children in the villages of Chimoio and Beira. They invariably request sexual services of women.

In Gambia, middle-aged European women seek sex with young local men. The prevailing model is that of street children, women or boys that use sex to supplement their income from other activities, such as begging.

A report by the Kenyan Society for Infant Welfare noted the presence of commercial sex exploitation of girls and boys in Nairobi, the coastal towns of Mombasa, Malindi and Lamu, and some other resorts.

Maryam, who left Somalia in 1992 during the civil war is a typical case of girl prostitute in Kenya. At the age of 12 she left the refugee camp in search of food and work. Knowing very little English and without any Kenyan identity documents, she ended up as a prostitute. «I left the camp to eat better and help my family, I found a good job.»

She works in the tourist area of Mombasa, where many of her clients are European men. Certain bars and brothels are well-known for the sex services of girls and boys offered to tourists. Taxi-drivers, tourist guides and hotel employees are involved in obtaining women or minors for foreigners. There have also been reports of cases in which very poor families sell their daughters or sons to tourists.

In Eastern Europe there is evidence of children in Russia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Rumania being sexually exploited by foreign visitors. Furthermore, there is also traffic of children to brothels in Western Europe. Children disappear and there is a production of child pornography.

Asia has been recognized as the region most complicated by this situation. It was openly promoted as a sex destination during the seventies and eighties. People have started to associate certain countries, such as Thailand and Philippines, as having easy access to this type of "services". Dissemination of this tag probably started during the Vietnam war, when both countries became popular because of the supply of services and other forms of recreation for men. Many of these bars and sex industry businesses were and still are the property of foreigners.

The United Nations estimates that over a million people, between boys, girls and adolescents, are subject to sexual exploitation in Asia alone.

The Government of Thailand recognizes that the country is undergoing an ignominious problem of child prostitution, accepting that the victims are approximately 10 thousand. This figure has been widely contradicted by NGOs, who consider that the number of minors involved may be as many as 800 thousand. Trade in sex of children in Thailand is not new. In the eighties in Bangkok alone 70 thousand women were involved in prostitution.

In the Philippines, NGOs estimate that between 60 and 100 thousand children are involved in the sex industry. Child prostitutes are available in bars and brothels, tourist hotels, streets and beaches, with identity documents certifying false ages.

Both in Thailand and in Philippines, traditional practices, the arrival of numerous male migrant workers, the military presence during the second World War, the Vietnam and Korean wars, the massive scale of tourist development and active promotion of sex tourism since the seventies are factors that have given rise to the increase of trade in sex of women.

In South Asia, five countries stand out: Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Certain religious practices legitimize prostitution of thousands of girls. These countries share the origin of the problems: poverty, gender discrimination, family fragmentation, and an aggressive sex industry. They also share the same consequences: degraded children, weakening of social values and a generational problem in life expectancy due to the number of deaths from AIDS.

Poverty, exploitation and discrimination are mixed together, making girls and women cheap merchandise in South Asia. Similar problems are to be found in Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Taiwan and Burma.

THE TRADE OF PEOPLE

Trade or traffic is defined as the transportation of persons from one place to another, misleading them, using violence, extortion, etc. with the objective of trade in sex.

The traffic of people, especially for sex purposes, has been a

common practice in many societies throughout history. In the past few decades, the traffic of women and children has taken on various forms and origins. Ethical, moral, political, economic and health factors, as well as those related with a strictly commercial standpoint, are involved in the need to analyze their dimensions.

For international organized crime, traffic in people is one of the most important economic activities in addition to the traffic of drugs and arms and has reached critical proportions.

The most important trade in children for sex purposes takes place among neighboring countries in South Asia, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. Recent reports reveal that thirteen year old adolescents are traded and sold to brothels in Australia and Japan.

The money involved in this transaction depends on the age, virginity (or use) and beauty of the young girls. The human being is converted into a merchandise and the law of supply and demand applies as for any product, goods or services found on the market.

The case of Suriname reflects the domination exerted by the Northern countries over those in the South. There is an intense traffic in women between the Netherlands and Suriname. Suriname was a Dutch colony until 1975 and it still maintains strong links with that country.

In 1991, a large white slave traffic network was discovered that took girls from Montevideo, Uruguay, to Milan, Italy. Uruguayan justice criminally indicted various members of said network, however it was only one branch of the network.

In Italy, between 18 and 25 thousand young foreign girls exercise clandestine prostitution. In many cases they were misled about the job they would have, in others they knew that they would be prostitutes, but were misled on the conditions. Once in Italy, they are treated as slaves and total control is exercised over their lives.

According to a report in WP Diocesana, published in Rome, many young foreign women who are involved in sex trade in Rome, Milan and Naples are from Albania, former Yugoslavia and Nigeria. In Rome alone there are three thousand foreign prostitutes and over two thousand in Milan. It is reported that the first wave came from Poland during 1989–1990. The second was between 1991–1992 and the young girls came from Nigeria, Peru and Colombia. The third wave came between 1993–1994 from rural zones in Albania and former Yugoslavia. From 1995 onwards, Nigerian girls fleeing from misery have come to Italy.

HOW MUCH LONGER?

The States have an important task to carry out. So far, classical positions have been to repress or to prohibit prostitution; or to regulate its practice; or to abolish regulations penalizing the exploiters. These policies have been so deficient in comparison with the outright growth of trade in sex, that some States have done the reverse. The Group of Experts gathered by UNESCO in 1985 proposed adding a category to those mentioned above, de-

fining a reference to «promotor» States that make prostitution a planned chapter in their national income.

The UN intention to expressly point out to governments that they are promoting trade in sex, either by action or by omission, would be a good step for calling the attention of countries to the fact that this trade goes against human rights, if they are not yet aware of it.

There is universal consensus in deploring the use of children and adolescents. In 1996 UNICEF reported that its actions include monitoring against sex exploitation of children in the Dominican Republic, Nepal and Sri Lanka; a program in Thailand for counseling in education and employment aimed at young girls at risk; and programs in Brazil, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Guatemala, Egypt, Kenya, Morocco, Peru, Philippines and Senegal, to provide assistance specifically under difficult circumstances.

Furthermore, the UN Action Program for the Elimination of Exploitation of Child Labor states among its provisions: «To struggle, by all available means, against activities linked to prostitution, pornography and other forms of sex exploitation.»

Information and research are determining factors. Without knowledge of figures and cases that can be used to show the magnitude of the problem, the true situation cannot be demonstrated. The commitment of civil society through mass media and NGOs is of relevance as this is a little-known subject and one which involves much prejudice.

So far, the only action taken has been to repress those who are objects of trade in sex. The penalization of procurers has not been successful. Tourism is a twentieth century reality and can be used as a lever towards positive change in the third millennium if development promoters, investors and governments understood

the needs of the host communities, by being more responsible, respecting the social, cultural and natural environments and by being active in the elimination of the practice of exploitation that has emerged over the past few decades.

Special measures must be taken aimed at outposted military personnel or public servants. During a period of five years, the international NGO ECPAT has followed up on the activities of pedophiles and sex tourists in Asia. Throughout this period, they have documented the names and other data concerning 160 foreign males who have been arrested by the police forces of Asian countries because of sex abuse against prostitute minors.

This task has shown that the countries of origin of these 160 men are the following: 40 abusers from the USA, 28 from Germany, 22 from Australia, 19 from the U.K., 10 from France, 7 from Japan, 7 from Canada, 5 from Switzerland, 4 from Sweden, 4 from Denmark, 3 from Austria, 3 from Belgium, 3 from Holland, 1 from Spain, 1 from Saudi Arabia, 1 from South Africa. During the first half of this period, most of the cases were reported in the Philippines. During the second half, there was an increase in the number of cases in Thailand.

Attention to and follow-up of these cases is essential in order to underscore the seriousness of the problem. Assistance between States is also necessary to struggle against exploitation of persons. Assistance between people is necessary to struggle against exploitation in some countries.

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