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The Facts About Child Sex Tourism

"There's a special evil in the abuse and exploitation of the most innocent and vulnerable. The victims of sex trade see little of life before they see the very worst of life — an underground of brutality and lonely fear."

— President George W. Bush before the UN General Assembly, September 2003

What Is Child Sex Tourism?

Each year, over a million children are exploited in the global commercial sex trade. Child sex tourism (CST) involves people who travel from their own countries to another and engage in commercial sex acts with children. CST is a shameful assault on the dignity of children and a form of violent child abuse. The sexual exploitation of children has devastating consequences, which may include long-lasting physical and psychological trauma, disease (including HIV/AIDS), drug addiction, unwanted pregnancy, malnutrition, social ostracism, and possibly death.

Tourists engaging in CST often travel to developing countries looking for anonymity and the availability of children in prostitution. The crime is typically fueled by weak law enforcement, corruption, the Internet, ease of travel, and poverty. Previous cases of child sex tourism involving U.S. citizens have included a former pediatrician, a retired Army sergeant, a dentist, and a university professor. Child pornography is frequently involved in these cases; drugs also may be used to solicit or control the minors.

A Global Response

State Department Photo

Over the last five years, there has been an increase in prosecution of CST offenses. At least 32 countries have extraterritorial laws that allow the prosecution of their citizens for CST crimes committed abroad. In response to the phenomenon of CST, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the tourism industry, and government leaders have begun to address the issue. The World Tourism Organization, the NGO *End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes* (ECPAT), and Nordic tour operators created a global *Code of Conduct to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism* in 1999. As of June 2005, 200 travel companies from 21 countries had signed the code (see www.thecode.org).

Many governments have taken commendable steps to combat child sex tourism. For example, France's Ministry of Education and travel industry representatives developed guidelines on CST for tourism schools. State-owned Air France shows in-flight videos and allocates a portion of in-flight toy sales to fund CST awareness programs. Brazil has a national awareness campaign on sex tourism. Italy requires tour operators to provide brochures in ticket jackets to travelers regarding its law on child sex offenses. Thailand is

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providing victims with shelter and essential services. The Gambia has a hotline which visitors can call to provide information to authorities on sex tourists. Senegal has established a special anti-CST unit within the national police force with offices in two popular tourist destinations. In India's Goa state, film developers must report obscene depictions of children to police. Sweden's Queen Silvia has made this issue a personal priority and is an effective global advocate.

What the United States Is Doing

In 2003, the United States strengthened its ability to fight child sex tourism by passing the *Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today* (PROTECT) Act and the *Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act*. These laws increase penalties to a maximum of 30 years in prison for engaging in CST. Since the passage of the PROTECT Act, there have been over 20 indictments and over a dozen convictions of child sex tourists. The Department of Homeland Security has developed the Operation Predator initiative to combat child exploitation, child pornography, and child sex tourism. The United States also is funding the NGO *World Vision* to conduct major public awareness and deterrence campaigns overseas.

To report suspected incidents of child sex tourism involving American citizens call the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement tipline at: 1-866-DHS-2ICE. If immediate assistance is needed, contact the regional security officer at the local American embassy or consulate, or foreign law enforcement officials.

What Governments Can Do

Enhance Research and Coordination:

- Research the extent and nature of the problem
- Draft an action plan for addressing CST
- Designate a government point of contact

Augment Prevention and Training:

- Encourage the travel industry to sign the Code of Conduct
- Fund and/or launch public awareness campaigns
- Train and sensitize law enforcement on the issue
- Ensure that border and airport officials report suspected cases

Strengthen Legal Measures and Prosecutions:

- Draft, pass and/or enforce extraterritorial laws criminalizing CST
- Increase punishment for offenders
- Cooperate with foreign governments
- Prosecute the crime to the fullest extent possible

Assist Victims:

- Provide shelter, counseling, medical, and legal assistance to victims
- Provide reintegration assistance
- Support the efforts of NGOs working with child victims

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Carlson Companies, Inc. CEO Marilyn Carlson Nelson signs the Code of Conduct to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism. With her is Ambassador John R. Miller, Director of the U.S. Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons.

What United States Citizens Can Do

- Stay informed and support the efforts of authorities and the tourism industry
- Report to the authorities abroad and/or to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement if you suspect children are being commercially sexually exploited in tourism destinations
- Be aware that any U.S. citizen or permanent legal resident arrested in a foreign country for sexually abusing minors may be subject to return to the U.S., and if convicted, can face up to 30 years imprisonment
- Support the efforts of NGOs working to protect children from commercial sexual exploitation

What Businesses Can Do

Travel, tourism, and hospitality companies can sign the *Code of Conduct to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism*, which requires them to implement the following measures:

- Establish a corporate ethical policy against commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC)
- Place clauses in contracts with suppliers stating a common repudiation of CSEC
- Report annually on their progress
- Train tourism personnel
- Provide information to travelers
- Provide information to local "key persons" at travel destinations

For more information, please log on to the Web site of the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons at www.state.gov/g/tip.