

Child Sexual Exploitation in Canada & U.S. in Global Spotlight

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 19, 2008 – Creating safe havens for trafficked children in the U.S. and increasing legal enforcement against child sex tourism in Canada should be two of the highest priorities for policies in North America to protect children from sexual exploitation, according to a report published jointly by Canadian and U.S. non-governmental organizations (NGOs) this month.

The report is being submitted to the World Congress III Against Sexual Exploitation of Adolescents and Children – a major international conference taking place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil next week.

While the report found many important steps have already been taken in Canada and the U.S. to confront child sexual exploitation, notably the passage of strong laws in both countries, it also highlights gaps that must be filled.

“One of the major gaps in Canada highlighted in this report is our very weak and ineffective sex offender registry”, says Rosalind Prober, President of Beyond Borders. “If we are serious about child protection, this registry needs an immediate upgrade.”

The Canadian federal law that makes sexually exploiting a child in another country a crime punishable in Canada was found to not be adequately enforced.

“In Canada, the lack of legal action against child sex tourism is the most glaring law enforcement gap,” states the report. “While child trafficking is beginning to be recognized in Canada with several recent prosecutions, there remains significant room for further enforcement action against traffickers and commercial child sex abusers.”

According to Benjamin Perrin, Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia, “Canada convicted just one of its child sex tourists in the decade after promising to crack down on them in 1996 at the First World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation of Children.”

In the U.S. commercially sexually exploited children are too often arrested instead of offered assistance and protection, because there are so few shelters equipped to care for their special needs. “Police officers are really in a bind in most cities. Girls as young as 12 years old are rescued from their pimps, but there are so few places to bring them. They end up in jail, with a criminal record. This has to stop,” says Carol Smolenski, Executive Director of ECPAT-USA.

“It is a tragedy when a child is prostituted in America and goes to jail for the crime that is committed against her, while her trafficker and her buyer face little to no punishment,” said Shared Hope International President and Founder Linda Smith.

Other recommendations that emerged from the meeting include: creating a national plan of action in the United States, developing Child Advocacy Centers in Canada and focusing on prevention in both countries.

The full report can be read at: <http://www.sharedhope.org/what/Consultation.asp>

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