

## International Ministries Resolution on Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism

### **BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE**

One of the most enduring images that we have of our Lord is of his gathering the children around him. He would say of them, "It is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs" (Luke 18:16 NRSV). To this he added a warning: "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6 NRSV). The words of Jesus provide a very vivid picture of God's love for children and God's anger at those who defile and abuse them.

The prophets of Old Testament times understood that the exploitation of children would earn the wrath of God. Joel wrote, "They have divided my land, and cast lots for my people, and traded boys for prostitutes and sold girls for wine..." (Joel 3:2b-3 NRSV). The most convincing evidence against Manasseh, King of Judah, was that "He made his son pass through fire in the valley of Hinnom" (II Chronicles 33:6a NRSV). One of the central truths of our faith is that God is a loving parent to us and urges us to be so to one another.

The witness of Scripture stands against abuse and exploitation of children in general and provides firm ground for challenging those who profit from using children as prostitutes in Asian tourism.

### **SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS**

Areas where prostitution has traditionally prospered are experiencing a growing trade in child prostitution. A time of economic prosperity along the Pacific Rim has brought about the development of tourist trade resulting in an alarming expansion of child prostitution. American Baptist missionaries and other observers report that, while most of the clients are from the indigenous population, the flow of American, North European, and Asian tourists has facilitated a new and more devastating chapter in this already demeaning trade.

The brothel owners' search for younger girls and boys has reached into rural areas in order to supply prostitutes to those who think young persons are less likely to carry the AIDS virus, desire a virgin, or are pedophiles. Since the economic boom of the coastal cities has bypassed many rural areas, the youth of those areas are frequently deceived into going into the city only to find themselves enslaved within the sex industry. Those who recruit children frequently tell the parents that the child will be a waitress or hotel worker. Unfortunately, many poverty stricken parents are ignorant of the dangers and see the sale

of a child as the only escape from poverty. At the brothel the child finds that there is no escape and that even the police may collaborate with brothel owners to keep prostitutes at work.<sup>1</sup> Commonly the child is expected to "work off" the price paid to the parents. This may take three to four years. Often the child has contracted AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases before the debt is paid. These children sometimes return home to villages, leading to the spread of these diseases.

The issue of child prostitution in Asian tourism is closely related to poverty and attitudes toward:

1. Women
2. Prostitution
3. Parents' right to sell/indenture children
4. Sexual promiscuity
5. Materialism

There are those who are working within the Asian cultures to end child prostitution. However, because of its lucrative nature and the role of international forces within the tourist-sex market, international cooperation is needed to successfully combat this abusive trade.<sup>2</sup>

Since January 1982, a group of churches has been seeking to respond to tourism from the perspective of its victims.<sup>3</sup> One product of this effort has been the establishment of the Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism (ECTWT), a group of people from developing countries who are deeply concerned about the impact of tourism on their nations. The work of confronting child prostitution in Asia has benefited from the campaign to End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism.<sup>4</sup> ECPAT is the product of ECTWT, the Christian Conference of Asia, and the Asia Catholic Bishop's Conference.

Of particular interest to us is that International Ministries has a long history of mission work in three heavily affected countries--Myanmar (Burma), the Philippines, and Thailand. Consequently, efforts by American Christians to end child prostitution will have a very positive effect on the work of our missionaries and the national leaders with whom they work.

Therefore--

Whereas, child prostitution in Asia has dramatically expanded due, in part, to foreign tourism and business, and

Whereas, enslavement, destruction of family life, intense abuse of children, and exposure to AIDS and other illnesses are a direct result of this trade, and

Whereas, tourists, business people, and military personnel from the USA participate in this trade, and

Whereas, the principles of our Christian faith cry out against this practice, and

Whereas, other Asian governments have condemned this practice, and

Whereas, the USA has recently passed legislation making illegal the commission of sexual crimes against children overseas,<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, be it resolved

1. That the Board of International Ministries condemns and deplors the sexual exploitation of children in Asia as an affront to the will of God and a crime against humanity;
2. That the Board of International Ministries supports those who seek to end child prostitution in Asia;
3. That International Ministries support the work of ECPAT;
4. That the Board of International Ministries affirms its support of the U.N. Convention on the rights of child;
5. That the Board of International Ministries use whatever channels are available to us to communicate to foreign governments our support of U.S. law to help end child prostitution;
6. That the Board of International Ministries raise this issue with our constituency and partner conventions, solicit their prayers, and call them to work together in ending child prostitution.

Adopted by the Board of International Ministries - June 18, 1995

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**ENDNOTES:**

1. A Modern Form of Slavery, page 49.
2. "None of the measures needed to stop trafficking and related abuses will take place without concerted international pressure because there is too much money to be made from the practice." Ibid. p.9.
3. The Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism (ECTWT) was founded in January

1982, following a workshop on Third World Tourism (held in Manila, Philippines in 1980) organized by the Churches in order to support those who were seeking to respond to tourism from the perspective of its victims. "Contours and the Ecumenical Coalition in Third World Tourism." Non-copyrighted brochure.

4. ECPAT, 475 Riverside Dr., Room 621, New York, NY 10115.

5. "(b) TRAVEL WITH INTENT TO ENGAGE IN A SEXUAL ACT WITH A JUVENILE.

- A person who travels interstate commerce, or conspires to do so, or a United States citizen or an alien admitted for permanent residence in the United States who travels in foreign commerce, or conspires to do so, for the purpose of engaging in any sexual act (as defined in section 2245) with a person under 18 years of age would be in violation of chapter 109A if the sexual act occurred in the special maritime and territorial jurisdiction of the United States shall be fined under this title, imprisoned not more than 10 years, or both.

Grassly Amendment, Title XVI-Child Pornography

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## **POLICY BASE**

### **American Baptist Policy Statement on Health, Healing and Wholeness**

"In order to fulfill our ministries of health, healing and wholeness we call upon--

3. all ABC program boards, colleges and seminaries and other related organizations to:

- promote community-based wellness programs; and
- provide resources on health, healing and wholeness for use by groups and individuals in local communities.

4. all American Baptists to pray for the health, healing and wholeness of all creation."

### **American Baptist Policy Statement of Human Rights**

"...there are strong negative forces at work among political, social and economic powers on national...levels, producing...isolation, and deprivation of the rights of groups and individuals.

The Bible places human beings at the summit of creation and asserts the right of human beings to full humanity as children of God.

Thus, in the effort to identify with victims of injustice and oppression, pain and sorrow, we meet again the Christ on the cross, and we recognize that suffering continues in

today's world in the struggle against principalities and powers as we seek to move toward God's purposes for the shalom of all humankind.

As American Baptists we declare the following rights to be basic human rights, and we will support programs and measures to assure these rights:

- 5. the right to grow in mind and self-fulfillment...
- 9. the right to human dignity, to be respected and treated as a person..."

**American Baptist Policy Statement on Women and Men as Partners in Church and Society**

5. We affirm that children are not to be neglected in order that parents may develop their careers and/or interests. This means that parents must give appropriate support to their children as the family moves through the successive stages from the birth of children to their leaving home as adults...

8. We affirm that Christian men and women have a special calling to be advocates and models for children and youth..."

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