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Sex Trafficking and the Slavery of Women and Children:

Fighting Crime at its Roots

Abstract: (127 words)

Sex trafficking is a global criminal industry that impacts women and children from all countries of the world, ensnaring hundreds of thousands of innocent lives every year. The grotesque nature of the sex slavery industry makes it a significant humanitarian issue in the modern 21st century. This paper dissects the inner workings of the sex trafficking network, focusing mainly on its economic motivation. The roots of this organized crime lie in the supply and demand that is created by financial disparities between countries, and cultural values in affluent destinations countries. The United States has a responsibility to regulate sex trafficking within its borders. One solution is to legalize prostitution so as to provide a useful pathway to better regulate criminal activities and protect victims of sex slavery.

Sex Trafficking and the Slavery of Women and Children:

Fighting Crime at its Roots

Sex trafficking is a global criminal industry that generates billions of dollars every year. This business illegally transports approximately one million women and children across national boundaries every year, for the purpose of sexual exploitation. This relatively new form of organized crime thrives largely because it has adapted to the modern globalized economy. The crime units are structured loosely and scattered throughout nearly all countries of the world, allowing it to flow unhindered and often undetected across borders. The transnational nature of this crime is also promoted by growing economic inequalities between countries. Although there are exceptions, the large majority of women are captured and transported from poorer source countries, to more affluent destination countries where there is sufficient demand, such as the United States. Although sex slaves in the US are not often of American decent, the supply of clientele in the US provides the demand necessary to sustain a market in sex slavery. A global perspective on this crime, through statistical findings and personal accounts, will help uncover the nature of the sex trafficking industry as a whole. Given that this business is highly adapted to the modern global economy, it is necessary to not only implement legislation to fight sex trafficking, but to also penetrate the economic demand the sustains the market for sex slavery. This demand has the potential to sustain and promote a market for sex slavery throughout the world. Therefore, in order to stop the sex trafficking industry at its roots, affluent destination countries such as America must discover and change the cultural and economic basis of their desire for commercial sex and acceptance of sexual exploitation.

The U.S. Congress defines sex trafficking as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act” (Nelson, 2002,

p.573). It is estimated that between 700,000 and 4 million people are trafficked each year (Nelson, 2002, p.551). The U.S. government estimates about 50,000 of these victims are trafficked to the United States. Young women and children are the most vulnerable and most commonly targeted groups. The average age is eleven years old, with a general range of nine to nineteen. Although there have been cases of children as young as 5 being sold into sex slavery (Greenberg, 2005). Sex traffickers often target women who are stricken by poverty and struggling to feed themselves and their families (Farr, 2004, p.1). Children are either kidnapped straight off of the streets, or they are sold by parents to criminals posing as job recruiters. Families sometimes think they are doing the best for their children, while making a small profit to momentarily stifle their perpetual hunger. In this way, economic inequality and poverty in third world countries drives the sex trafficking industry by generating an endless supply of victims.

Due to the extreme conditions in third world countries, coercion is an easy tool for criminals looking to enslave desperate women. Young women are often coerced with false promises of high paying and respectable jobs in other countries. Persuasion is hardly necessary, and any inhibitions are generally restrained by pure desperation. The story of a young girl named Maria illustrates the deception that girls and their families face. Maria's family sent her to Miami from her home town of Santiago Tuxla, in Veracruz. A family friend had promised Maria a good job that would pay many times what she could possibly earn in Veracruz. It was not long before Maria discovered that this "friend" secretly worked for the Cadena family, one of the most infamous sex trafficking rings in the U.S. Upon arrival in the Miami, Maria was enslaved and transported throughout the state of Florida to service field-workers and other laboring men (Farr, 2004, p. 32-33). Women and children are transported to their destinations, only to find that

their “good jobs” were complete fabrications. The young victims are ensnared by lies and deception into an elaborate system of dominance and abuse that ensures their total compliance.

Once a victim is enslaved, she will often go through an initiation period in which she is starved, beaten, and gang raped into submission. A young girl named Mira from Nepal, India, recounts the story of her initiation. At the age of thirteen, Mira was transported to a brothel in Bombay where she refused to have sex with brothel clients. She was terrified by the scene at the brothel; all she could see was “tens-of thousands of young women...displayed in row after row of zoo-like animal cages” (Farr, 2004, p. 39). Mira took a grave risk when deciding to resist her captors, and she paid heavily. She was isolated in a small, dark room without food and water for many days. When she was sufficiently weak, a member of the brothel beat her unconscious; when she awoke she had been stripped naked, and she found that a cane “smeared with pureed red chili peppers [had been] shoved into her vagina.” Later she was raped by the brothel guards and initiation was complete and “successful,” she never dared to resist again (Farr, 2004, p. 42). This physical abuse serves the purpose of breaking down the girl’s self-confidence and creating psychological dependence upon her captor.

In addition to psychological and physical abuse, isolation from their community keeps girls feeling sufficiently alienated and alone. Victims often find themselves in foreign countries where they are illegal aliens and cannot speak the common language. Therefore, they would not dare to seek local authorities for help, fearing that they might be turned away or even prosecuted for their illegal status. Brothel owners often enforce strict social and space regulations to perpetuate their victim’s feelings of solitude. Physical and emotional isolation ensures that escape is almost never attempted. Criminals often control their victims by threatening to torture

and/or kill the families. Numerous personal accounts have revealed that the children often felt obligated to obey in order to protect their families.

Women are not only enslaved emotionally and physically, but economically as well, through a very common debt-bondage system. A sex worker's debt begins with the price of their transportation and/or the initial price for which they were sold to their pimp or brothel. This debt is abstract in nature, as there are no legal documents regulating it and women often remain unaware of the actual amount that they owe (Farr, 2004, p.26). Instead, it is regularly manipulated for the purpose of perpetual enslavement. Fifteen year old Maria from Veracruz (mentioned above), accounts that she was forced to service an average of 20-30 men per night, 6 days per week. Each customer would pay \$20-25 for 15 minutes with her, and she would "receive" only \$3 per customer. That minimal profit, however, went straight to her perpetual debt (Farr, 2004, p.21). The extent of a woman's debt never diminishes with the small percentage of profit that she earns; in fact it often increases, as she is charged additionally for boarding, food, and as punishment (i.e. for weight gain, refusing customers...etc). In this way, victims of this crime are bound by many methods including "debt-bondage," and are thus enslaved in every sense of the term psychologically, physically, and economically.

The global extent of the sex trafficking crime is immense, organized, and widespread. It is the third fastest growing international crime, just under the drugs and weapons industry (Nelson, 2002, p.574). The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation estimates that human trafficking generates approximately \$9.5 billion per year, and can be connected to further crime such as "money laundering, drug trafficking, document forgery, and human smuggling. Where organized crime flourishes, governments and the rule of law are undermined and weakened" (U.S. Department of State, 2006, p.13). The relative impact of the sex trafficking on countries across

the globe is reflected by statistical evidence estimating the number of trafficked victims in each country. While the United States harbors at least 50,000 trafficked sex slaves, statistics in third world countries are shockingly high. For example 60,000 Nepalese and 45,000 Bangladeshi women and children are sex slaves in the city of Calcutta alone (Farr, 2004, p.7). Statistics prove that this is truly a global and multicultural problem. In the year 2000, a U.N. report by top crime official Pino Arlacchi shows that:

Out of 1 million women who are trafficked into sex slavery, 225,000 are from Southeast Asia, 200,000 from the former Soviet republics, 150,000 are from South Asia, 100,000 are from Latin America and the Caribbean, 75,000 are from Eastern Europe, and 50,000 of more from Africa (Farr, 2004, p.4).

The fact that sex trafficking has become fully established in many nations, reaching a broad spectrum of women, is afforded to its success is the face of globalization.

The organization of this crime is loosely and cooperatively based, which allows it to freely permeate all countries. The modern world has gone through some major changes due to recent globalization. Improved technology allows for easy international communication and increased commerce and travel has resulted in looser national boundaries. Although traditional organized crime groups, such as the Russian Mafia, Chinese Triads, and the Japanese Yakuza, have been known for their involvement, the structure of sex trafficking is largely un-hierarchical and has little central management. Much of the crime's success and stability is oddly afforded to its loose configuration and untraceable authority, allowing it to flow unnoticed across national boundaries (Farr, 2004, p.59-60). This form of slavery has infiltrated almost all countries throughout the world, including in the United States of America, the so called "land of the free."

Due to the unstructured nature of the sex trafficking industry, only so much can be done politically and legally to stifle its progress. The first structured anti-trafficking effort was put forth by the United States when it implemented the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. The government recognized that the problem of sex trafficking had begun to penetrate the country at an ever increasing rate in the late 1990's (Soderlund, 2005, p.73). In 2000, immigration officials had identified 250 brothels in 26 cities where known trafficking victims were working as prostitutes (Farr, 2004, p.6). This act established a committee to supervise and report the anti-trafficking efforts by the U.S. and other countries across the world (See Appendix A for details from the 2006 Trafficking in Persons Report). The act also outlines specific obligations of the government to support non-profit organizations that spread awareness of sex trafficking. Organizations that reach out to high risk countries, and those that "advance women's political, economic, and educational roles in those countries," are particularly valuable (Nelson, 2002, p.574). Spreading awareness of the sex trafficking crime to women in impoverished countries will help protect them from deception and reduce supply to the market.

The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act most importantly establishes strict legislation in the U.S. for prosecuting criminals. Sentences for sex trafficking criminals prior to the Trafficking Act of 2000 were no more than ten to fifteen years depending on the age of the victim. Now, if the victim is under the age of fourteen, an offender could receive a lifetime sentence; and if the victim is older than fourteen but younger than eighteen, the sentence is generally twenty years (Nelson, 2002, p.577). These punishments are not only appropriate considering the offenses, but are also necessary to discourage involvement in these extremely lucrative criminal activities.

Along with legal prosecution for perpetrators, the new legislation also reaches out to victims of sex trafficking who can provide valuable information about the trafficking rings. The factor that most discourages sex trafficking victims from seeking legal assistance is the fear of violent retaliation towards themselves or their families, and prosecution for illegal alien status. The Trafficking Act removes these two hurdles by offering protection for victims and families if the victim is under the age of 18, and offering visas for illegal aliens if they willingly aid the government in prosecution of their captors (Nelson, 2002, p.575-576). The Trafficking Act has great long term potential, particularly by spreading awareness throughout impoverished countries, and providing measures to encourage victims to seek legal assistance. Legal actions, however, are not the only forms of prevention that must be adopted. In order to reach the roots of this globally adapted system, the problem of cultural and economic incentives that drive the market of sex slavery must also be tackled.

The statistical trends showing power imbalances between “source” and “destination” countries provide insight into how the market for sex trafficking is propagated. “Source” countries are defined as regions from which victims are enslaved, while “destination” countries are those to which they are taken. The increasing economic/financial disparity between the developed and third world countries causes poor countries to victimize their own people for the attainment of wealth (Mathews, 2005, p.661-662). “Source” countries are generally third world, or economically unstable countries, where women and children are found in desperate conditions. While “destination” countries supply the clientele base, from which, demand for commercial sex ultimately drives the market for sex trafficking. The routes are endless but still “patterned,” in general “a country’s level of human development, rates of poverty and joblessness, and size of per capita income or gross domestic product tend to be related to its

primary sex trafficking role” (Farr, 133). Each country plays its own part in the trafficking business, and each contributes to the propagation of the sex slavery market by providing supply and/or demand.

The United States is a “destination” country that is a contributor to the demand for sex slavery; the map provided in Appendix B illustrates many of the known trafficking routes to America (each route depicted has at least one personal account to support it). Notice that the “source” countries depicted on this map are dispersed across the globe. According to a pie graph constructed by the U.S. department of state in 2005, the nationalities of victims in the U.S. are predominantly East Asian/Pacific, South Asian, and European/Eurasian (See Appendix C). The prospect of the American Dream is an easy tool for bribing women; the vision of Hollywood, and the hope for fame and fortune in businesses such as modeling and acting, is every young girl’s dream. The United States represents a beacon of freedom and prosperity that often clouds the judgments of young impoverished women.

Supply may be the fuel for sex slavery here in America, but the demand for commercial sex services is the engine that propagates the market. Pornography and violence in the media may be a few of the cultural factors that influence the buyers of commercial sex services in the United States. The United States has an advanced and long established fondness for pornography, which has now expanded in scope and acceptance through its circulation on the World Wide Web. Even back in 1996, “Americans spent more than \$8 billion on X-rated video, sales and rentals, live sex shows, adult cable shows, computer pornography, and adult magazines” (Davidson, 2005, p.102). As pornography has become more commonplace, it has also evolved to encompass sexual exploitation of children and violent fantasies of male

domination. It has also gained further acceptance from the public due to the effects of regular exposure.

Social acceptance of pornography and prostitution has likely been a leading cause of demand for commercial sex services. The following quote illustrates how the commodity-like nature of commercial sex is attributed to the teachings of our culture:

demand must be socially constructed in the sense that people have to be taught to imagine that they want or need a given product of service...they have to be taught that consuming [sexual] services is a signifier that they are 'having fun', a marker of their social identity and social status (Davidson, 2005, p.112-113).

These social status issues are of particular importance to young boys in America who are lead to believe that they must prove, or earn, their masculinity. Sometimes men buy sex because the act can somehow signify not only masculinity in terms of gender, but also race or ethnic identity. Here is where a demand for particular types of sex workers comes into play. For instance if you pay more for a "classier" brothel that employs Thai women, instead of migrant workers, then you are considered higher on the social hierarchy (Davidson, 2005, p.114-115). Often, engaging in commercial sex is considered an initiation into manhood, something like a coming of age ritual. Sex acts may be pressured upon young boys by their friends or social group. These belief systems are manifestations of traditional stereotypes that mandate men's physical domination over women.

The main support system of the market is based upon the clientele; these people create a demand for trafficked victims and thus play a significant role in sustaining the sex trafficking industry. Surprisingly, this group is largely ignored when addressing the problem of trafficking, because they are a viewed as a product of the horrible criminal industry that exists. In fact, the

consumers mandate the market's existence by pumping money into the system. Therefore, according to Julia Davidson, Professor of Sociology at the University of Nottingham, it is "our responsibility [to] change [the consumers'] behavior by all means available- educational, cultural, and through legislation that penalizes men for the crime of sexual exploitation" (p.107). President George W. Bush recently signed the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act into effect in 2005. This act reinstates the efforts put forth by the Trafficking Act of 2000, and more specifically addresses the need to reduce demand for commercial sex. President Bush's recent statement in The Trafficking of Persons Report of 2006 shows the government's intent to prosecute the buyers of sex:

We cannot put the criminals out of business until we also confront the problem of demand.

Those who pay for the chance to sexually abuse children and teenage girls must be held to account. So we'll investigate and prosecute the customers, the unscrupulous adults who prey on the young and innocent (U.S. Department of State, 2006, p.21).

However, predicting what legal action should be taken to effectively stop sex slavery without adding new fuel to the sex trafficking industry is a challenge.

It is obvious that victims of trafficking must be identified so that they can be protected and can further aid the government in fighting criminal organizations, but how can victims of sex slavery be distinguished from willing prostitutes? Legalizing prostitution, for example, in a manner that is responsibly regulated for the protection and health of the prostitute and customer would also allow for better regulation of commercial sex activities. Such legislation would allow the government to easily identify exploited minors or victims of trafficking. Other benefits are possible as well, such as routine health care to alleviating the enormous public health impact of prostitution. With the growing risk of STI's and the rapid

spreading of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, enforcement of routine medical examinations for prostitutes would better protect the country as a whole. On the other hand, many would argue that there can be no such thing as “willing” prostitution. If women are not forced into prostitution by coercion or exploitation, then they are forced by social or economic pressures imposed upon them from society. Financial pressures, particularly for single mothers, force many young women to sell their bodies on the streets. Given our society’s social perceptions of male dominance, women often accept the objectification of their bodies because they were taught to embrace the idea of being objects of desire. The objectification of women’s bodies is largely accepted in our society, and can be seen on television, throughout magazines, and on the streets of your average town. Women’s rights advocates might argue that legalization of prostitution would create further acceptance of women’s inferior status. However, improvement in women’s rights is a fight that will continue to prevail in the future regardless of prostitution, as it does today. The humanitarian effort to stop sex trafficking should be of the highest priority to women’s rights movement. The current legislation governing prostitution in the U.S. does not allow the government to draw concrete lines between what is and is not acceptable. Therefore, the legalization of prostitution should be considered as a pathway to more government involvement in the commercial sex industry, allowing for enhanced justice and protection for trafficked victims.

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&userGroupName=ucsantabarbara&version=1.0](http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=EAIM&docId=A133751174&source=gale&userGroupName=ucsantabarbara&version=1.0)
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Figure 1

Details from the 2006 Trafficking in Persons Report:

THE TIERS

TIER 1: Countries whose governments fully comply with the Act's minimum standards.

TIER 2 : Countries whose governments do not fully comply with the Act's minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.

TIER 2 SPECIAL WATCH LIST: Countries whose governments do not fully comply with the Act's minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards, and:

- a) The absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing; or
- b) There is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year; or
- c) The determination that a country is making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with minimum standards was based on commitments by the country to take additional future steps over the next year.

TIER 3: Countries whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so.

(U.S. Department of State, 2006, 46)

TIER 1

AUSTRALIA FRANCE MALAWI SOUTH KOREA
AUSTRIA GERMANY MOROCCO SPAIN
BELGIUM HONG KONG THE NETHERLANDS SWEDEN
CANADA IRELAND NEW ZEALAND SWITZERLAND
COLOMBIA ITALY NORWAY UNITED KINGDOM
DENMARK LITHUANIA POLAND
FINLAND LUXEMBOURG SINGAPORE

TIER 2

AFGHANISTAN EAST TIMOR LATVIA RWANDA
ALBANIA ECUADOR LEBANON SENEGAL
ANGOLA EL SALVADOR MACEDONIA SERBIA-MONTENEGRO
AZERBAIJAN ESTONIA MADAGASCAR SIERRA LEONE
BANGLADESH ETHIOPIA MALI SLOVAK REPUBLIC
BELARUS GABON MALTA SLOVENIA
BENIN THE GAMBIA MAURITIUS SRI LANKA
BOSNIA/HERZ. GEORGIA MOLDOVA SURINAME
BULGARIA GHANA MONGOLIA TAJIKISTAN

BURKINA FASO GREECE MOZAMBIQUE TANZANIA
BURUNDI GUATEMALA NEPAL THAILAND
CAMEROON GUINEA NICARAGUA TUNISIA
CHAD GUINEA-BISSAU NIGER TURKEY
CHILE GUYANA NIGERIA UGANDA
CONGO (DRC) HONDURAS PAKISTAN UKRAINE
COSTA RICA HUNGARY PANAMA URUGUAY
COTE D'IVOIRE JAPAN PARAGUAY VIETNAM
CROATIA JORDAN PHILIPPINES YEMEN
CZECH REPUBLIC KAZAKHSTAN PORTUGAL ZAMBIA
DOMINICAN REP. KYRGYZ REPUBLIC ROMANIA
TIER 2 WATCH LIST
ALGERIA CHINA (PRC) JAMAICA OMAN
ARGENTINA CYPRUS KENYA PERU
ARMENIA DJIBOUTI KUWAIT QATAR
BAHRAIN EGYPT LIBYA RUSSIA
BOLIVIA EQUATORIAL GUINEA MACAU SOUTH AFRICA
BRAZIL INDIA MALAYSIA TAIWAN
CAMBODIA INDONESIA MAURITANIA TOGO
CENTRAL AFRICAN REP. ISRAEL MEXICO UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

TIER 3

BELIZE IRAN SAUDI ARABIA UZBEKISTAN
BURMA LAOS SUDAN VENEZUELA
CUBA NORTH KOREA SYRIA ZIMBABWE

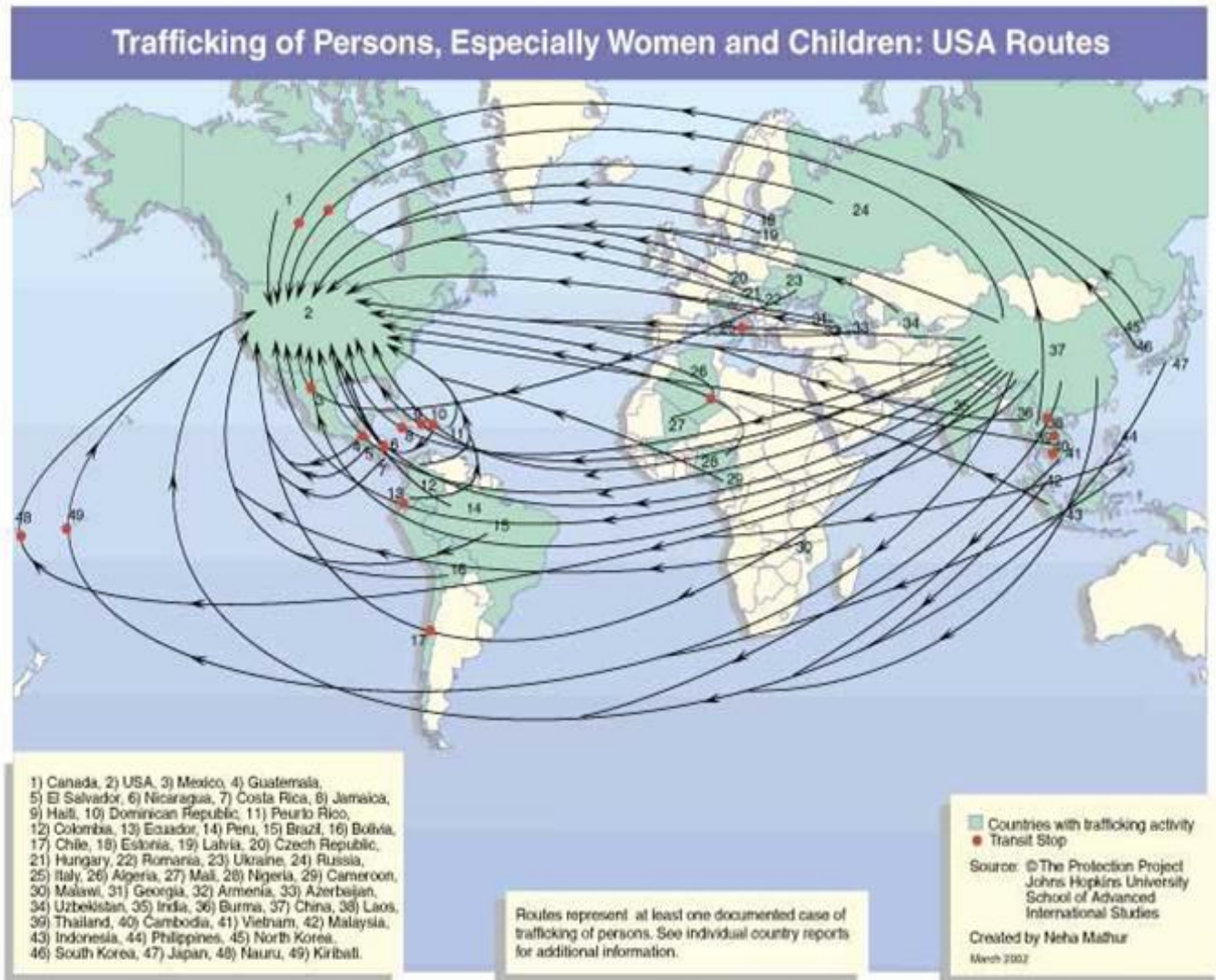
Source:

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Figure 2

Map of Trafficking routes to North America: (Note that labor trafficking is included)



The State Department estimates that 75,000 women and children are illegally brought into the U.S. annually for forced prostitution and other forms of slave labor. Source: www.protectionproject.org

Source:

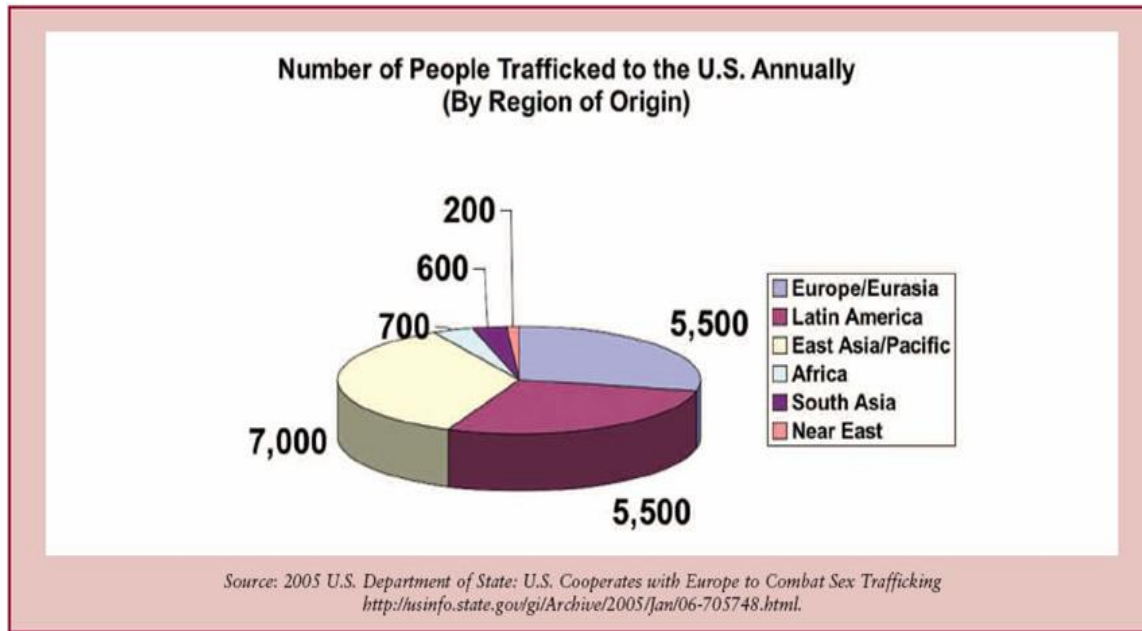
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Figure 3

Pie Graph of estimated origins for victims of sex trafficking to North

America:



Source:

U.S. Cooperates with Europe to combat sex trafficking. (January 6th, 2005). U.S. Department of State: International Information Programs. Retrieved April 29th, 2007 from the World Wide Web: <http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/Archive/2005/Jan/06-705748.html>