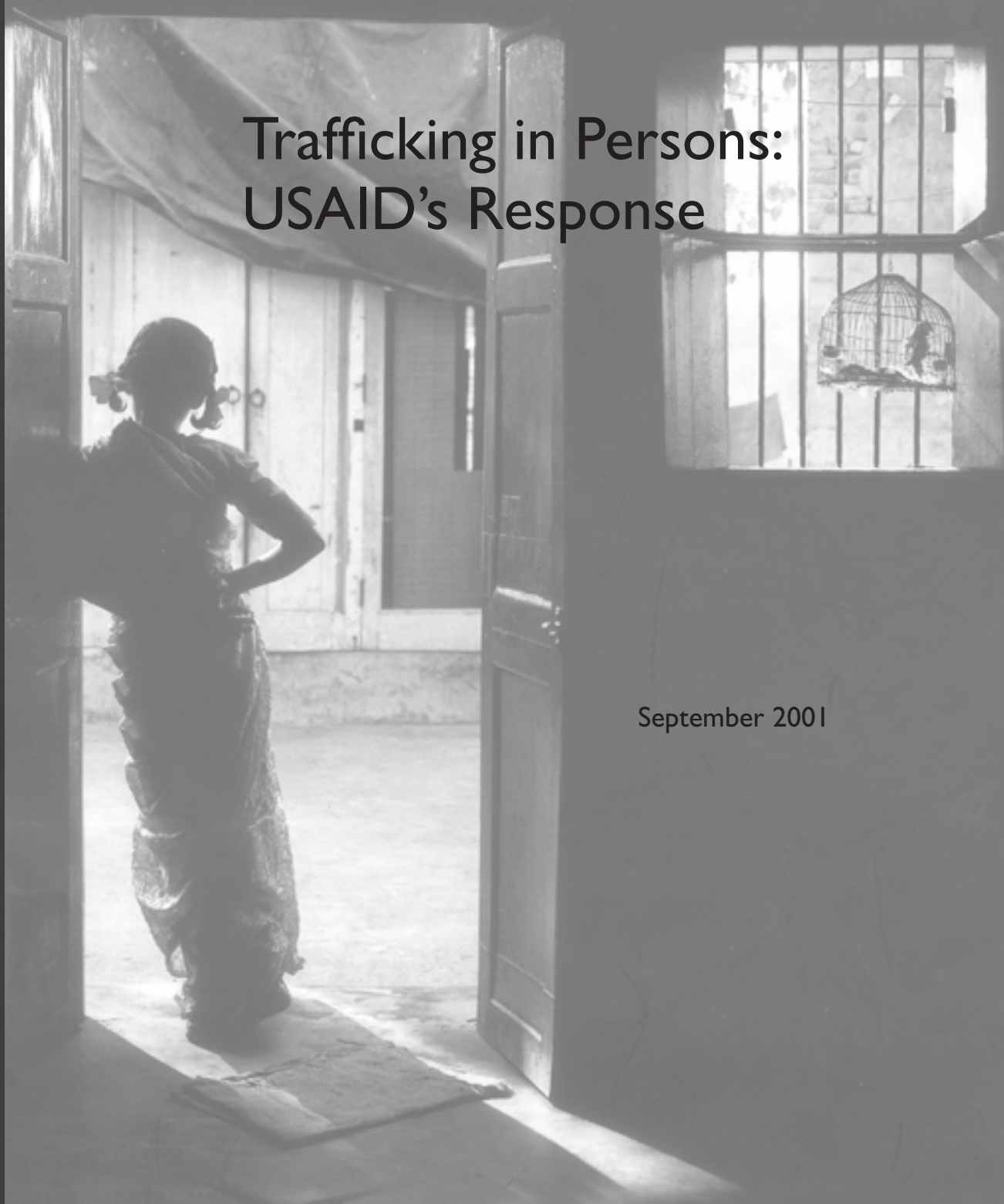
Trafficking in Persons: USAID's Response



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United States Agency for International Development
Office of Women in Development

Introduction

Trafficking in persons is a global problem. The UN Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, signed by 80 countries in December 2000 in Palermo, Italy, officially recognizes trafficking as a modern form of slavery and forced labor that relies on coercion, fraud or abduction in order to flourish. Worldwide, it is estimated that somewhere between 700,000[1] and four million[2] women, children and men are trafficked each year, and no region is unaffected. The large differential in estimated levels of trafficking reflects the difficulty in obtaining accurate data. However, that this is a significant and deplorable global phenomenon is not in doubt.

In Asia, trafficking supplies a growing international market for commercial sex and domestic labor, much of it involving children. In Africa, girls as well as boys are abducted and indentured by rebel armies and forced to take part in conflicts. In other instances children are taken across national boundaries, through force or deceit, to serve as agricultural laborers or to supply the sex trade. In the former Soviet Union and East and Central Europe, young women from economically stagnant rural areas and small towns in search of legitimate employment continue to be lured by traffickers into the sex trade or domestic servitude. In Latin America, as in the rest of the developing world, women and children are not only trafficked into prostitution and domestic servitude overseas, but within their own countries as well.

Women's and children's vulnerability and the low status of females generally, combined with poverty and expanding global markets for sex and cheap labor, are at the root of trafficking. The acceptability of violence against women within many societies contributes to a dynamic through which traffickers and clients see women as expendable, and the women themselves are so beaten down that they are unable to resist their captors.

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[1] U.S. Department of State. July 2001. *Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act 2000: Trafficking in Persons Report, page 1.*

[2] UN Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). September 2000. *State of the World's Population, 2000,* page 5.

Despite regional differences, trafficking patterns throughout the world have common threads. Most trafficking victims are women and children. Most are threatened with physical and emotional abuse, and nearly all suffer from neglect or disease. The risk of infection with HIV is alarmingly high among commercial sex workers and among girls and women forced into domestic or other labor situations where they often also are targets of sexual violence. When sick or unable to work, they may simply be discarded by their abductors. When discovered by authorities, many trafficked individuals are categorized as illegal immigrants and treated as criminals, rather than as victims of fraud and violence. Traffickers, on the other hand, can expect high profits. The same organized criminal networks that trade in weapons and narcotics are often also active in trafficking. Most operate without fear of reprisal because criminal sanctions against traffickers are often weak or not enforced. Unlike the trade in drugs and guns, the trade in women and children is virtually cost-free, and thus extraordinarily lucrative.

In response to the problem, the U.S. Congress enacted the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. U.S. anti-trafficking policy is based on a three-part integrated framework: (1) *prevention* of trafficking through education, public awareness and economic alternatives; (2) *protection* for the victims; and (3) *prosecution* of traffickers. Focusing only on the supply side of the problem will not eliminate trafficking. It is also important to address demand in destination countries and the lack of enforcement that allows large numbers of individuals to be trafficked across borders for the purpose of sexual or economic exploitation.

USAID Anti-Trafficking Activities

A significant part of USAID's development assistance is aimed at reducing poverty, promoting the rule of law, supporting the education of girls, and fostering economic and political opportunities for women. These programs help to create conditions that lessen the vulnerability of women and children to traffickers. In addition, USAID is funding direct anti-trafficking activities that include: prevention through economic and educational opportunities targeted at groups that are especially vulnerable to traffickers, public awareness, protection and rehabilitation of trafficked victims and legislative changes. Effective targeting of development and anti-trafficking activities requires an understanding of the factors underlying group and individual vulnerability. What can prevent families from selling their daughters to traffickers? What can keep women from believing that they can beat the odds of coercion by traffickers? We are beginning to deepen our understanding of these issues and to gather experience with on-the-ground programs.

In FY 2001, USAID field missions, regional bureaus and the Office of Women in Development are providing approximately $6 million for specifically targeted anti-trafficking activities. Approximately $2.5 million is being spent in the former Soviet Union and Central Europe and another $1.3 million in Asia. Two million dollars is being spent on programs ranging from assistance for children in Africa, cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments in Central Asia to combat trafficking and change legislation to examining cross-border trafficking for sexual exploitation in Latin America and the Caribbean. A number of these activities are carried out collaboratively with the Department of State and U.S. Embassies.

Children are often forced into begging and soliciting, domestic service, prostitution, or working on plantations, construction sites, and small factories. Trafficked children labor long hours in harsh, inhumane conditions. They are deprived of education, recreation, and basic health, food and sanitation. They are frequently subjected to sexual and physical abuse, or are forced to prostitute themselves to earn money for their employers.

The following summaries briefly describe trafficking problems by region and selected USAID direct anti-trafficking efforts.

Africa

In Africa, trafficking not only involves women and girls for the sex trade, but also the abduction of children to work in the agricultural sector and to serve as soldiers in internal conflicts. In West Africa particularly, traffickers take advantage of long-standing customs that permit sharing of children among extended families and communities. Thus, parents may believe that their

children are receiving well-paid employment and educational opportunities, either in other villages or abroad. It has been reported that between 10,000 and 15,000 Malian boys—likely trafficked outside their county—were working on plantations in the Ivory Coast during 1998.[3] Another study conducted in Benin and Gabon noted a dramatic increase in the number of children trafficked outside Benin from 117 in 1995 to 802 in 1997.[4] Accurate numbers are difficult to establish given social upheavals, cross-border conflicts and the lack of reliable data.

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West Africa. In partnership with the international cocoa and chocolate industry, USAID is mobilizing support for anti-trafficking activities in Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Cameroon and Guinea through its Sustainable Tree Crops Program (STCP). This program directly addresses forced child trafficking and labor in West Africa's tree crop industry. It brings together cocoa producers and processors, labor unions, governments and host-country civil society groups to ensure both that small producers get a fair price for their harvest and that the crop is not cultivated through forced child labor. USAID is working closely with all these groups to promote an action plan for the region.

Angola, Liberia, Nigeria, and Uganda. USAID missions in Africa are involved in several anti-trafficking initiatives with individual countries. In Angola, a two-year partnership with *The Street Girls Center*, a local NGO, provides basic literacy and vocational training and rehabilitation to abused women and war wives (including both former combatants and trafficked women). In Liberia, USAID supports a similar program, "Support to War-Affected Youth" implemented by Calvary Chapel, a local faith-based service institution, and managed by UNICEF. In Nigeria, USAID small grants help support the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), an organization that works with other NGOs to lobby regional governments, particularly in Edo State, to address trafficking issues. In Uganda a rehabilitation effort for war wives and former trafficked and abducted girls and women is being implemented in northern villages devastated by war and conflict. This activity promotes girls' education, rehabilitates former victims and provides training to increase health, skills and literacy.

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[3] Anti-Slavery Organization. May 2001. [http://www.antislavery.org/archive/other/trafficking-children-wafrica.htm] "Trafficking of Children in West Africa: Focus on Mali and Côte d'Ivoire," page 2.

[4] Anti-Slavery Organization. May 2001. [http://www.antislavery.org/archive/other/trafficking-benin-synopsis.htm] "Synopsis of a Report on the Trafficking of Children between Benin and Gabon," page 1.

Asia

Trafficking of persons is not a new phenomenon in Asia, but there is evidence that new forms, routes, and sources of trafficking have arisen in recent years. Several hundred thousand women and children are affected, both in Southeast Asia and the Asian sub-continent. According to some U.S. reports, Southeast Asia is the greatest source of trafficked women and girls into the United States.[5]

In Asia, as in other regions, traffickers target the most powerless and vulnerable groups in society. Trafficking victims are most often women and children who are poor, uneducated, unaware of their legal rights, and are engaged in marginal and low-status work. Ethnic minorities, "scheduled castes," unemployed or floating populations and indigenous people are particularly vulnerable to trafficking. A large percentage of victims is trafficked into prostitution, while others are subjected to domestic servitude, forced marriage, begging, illegal adoption, and other forms of exploitation. Traffickers may deceive parents or lure women and girls with false promises of well-paid work or marriage to wealthy husbands. Traffickers also obtain victims by purchasing them outright from family members or through debt bondage and kidnapping. Poverty, the corruption of law enforcement authorities, and pervasive discrimination against women and girls contribute to a regional environment in which trafficking flourishes. A significant amount of trafficking in Asia takes place within country borders. Most trafficked persons in India, the largest South Asian country affected, remain within the country; only a small percentage are actually trafficked across India's borders, mostly from Nepal and Bangladesh.

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South Asia Regional. USAID has responded to this problem by funding numerous anti-trafficking activities in recent years in conjunction with other donors. In 2000, USAID funded a large regional anti-trafficking effort for South Asia, managed by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), focused on prevention and education in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. USAID-UNIFEM's funding for prevention strategy includes support for networking and alliance-building among NGOs, community leaders, and the law enforcement community in an effort to generate political and community support for anti-trafficking initiatives. The organization arranges national meetings to help partners develop lob-

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[5] International Organization for Migration (IOM). February 2000. *Combating Trafficking in South Asia: A Review of Policy and Programme Responses*, page 6.

bying approaches and strategies for cooperating with other international groups. Interventions in the region include: reviews of existing laws and institutional mechanisms to protect women against trafficking in Nepal; training of trainers in providing therapeutic assistance to victimized children in Sri Lanka; mapping of trafficking routes in India; identification of source areas and forms of trafficking; and compiling of a directory of NGO activities in Bangladesh. UNIFEM also hosts regional and national workshops for senior police officers (with special funding support from the State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs), immigration officials, and judiciary members to discuss legal measures and enforcement mechanisms to combat trafficking. It facilitates cooperation between the media and NGOs, encouraging these groups to coordinate and inform the public about trafficking.

The UNIFEM program is designing media strategies for disseminating information about the causes and consequences of trafficking and engages in grassroots campaigns to gain community support for the elimination of trafficking among vulnerable groups. It is creating an anti-trafficking resource center together with a new website and database system in order to facilitate information dissemination and public discussion. Finally, UNIFEM lobbies South Asian governments for a stronger commitment to fighting trafficking through legislation and practice, evaluates the quality of government efforts to implement international and regional agreements against trafficking, and provides sub-grants to NGOs to test and implement new trafficking-prevention pilot projects. Some of the support for this South Asia regional program comes from USAID/Washington's Bureau for Asia and the Near East through a five-year regional effort designed to promote the economic, political and legal rights of women as a poverty-fighting strategy.

Through a grant to The Asia Foundation, USAID facilitates cross-border exchanges among police and local NGOs in India and Nepal. A 24-week training program dealing with women's rights and responsibilities, one week of which is devoted to trafficking issues, reaches upward of 130,000 women in rural areas, and 200,000 copies of an educational anti-trafficking comic book are being distributed to vulnerable groups.

Bangladesh. USAID/Bangladesh provides support and funding to the Action Against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC), a regional anti-trafficking network of NGOs. ATSEC builds anti-trafficking alliances, disseminates information, and promotes awareness-raising activities, particularly among vulnerable populations, such as rural populations and border region communities. USAID also supports the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) in its efforts to combat trafficking. BNWLA focuses on the protection of trafficking victims and the prosecution of trafficking perpetrators. The BNWLA provides legal aid, rehabilitation, and repatriation support services to trafficking survivors, and manages Proshanti, a shelter home for trafficking victims and abused women and children. BNWLA has provided shelter and services to nearly 1,000 women and children over several years. It also works in co-operation with the Government of Bangladesh to promote the prosecution of traffickers.

India. The USAID/India anti-trafficking initiative is being implemented in collaboration with UNIFEM. The activity provides grant support to policy planning processes within government agencies to implement the National Plan of Action, capacity building of NGOs (especially in legal skills), rehabilitation of children of sex workers through education, piloting of community-based actions to combating trafficking, and other activities. Information booths are being set up in Mumbai (Bombay) and at key points such as bus terminals and train stations to provide information and support to potential victims. Research studies have been commissioned to do situational analyses on trafficking, identify different vulnerability factors that perpetuate trafficking, and map source areas. Media and advocacy forms another important component of the India anti-trafficking activity.

Nepal. USAID/Nepal's anti-trafficking activities address the need for prevention and protection, focusing primarily on raising awareness, gathering information, promoting advocacy, and providing assistance to victims. USAID's anti-trafficking program funds NGOs and organizations working to combat trafficking and is closely coordinated with the Nepalese Government's national plan of action against trafficking. One of those NGOs, ABC, emphasizes the creation of educational opportunities for women and girls across 32 districts to reduce their vulnerability to trafficking. Informal classes for women are being held in seven districts of the country. Leadership training on combating trafficking, prevention of child labor and other related issues is given together with an economic empowerment program that promotes savings and provides credit and start-up funds to women. Another NGO, Maiti-Nepal, focuses on education, promotes community-based surveillance, and rescues and rehabilitates trafficked girls.

Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union

For many women and young girls in Central Europe and the former Soviet Union the promise of a job as a waitress, dancer, model, au pair, or maid in a foreign country is difficult to resist in the face of diminished economic opportunities at home. Syndicates of traffickers often disguise themselves as employment agencies to entrap women and girls in an elaborate web of prostitution rings throughout the world. Women are persuaded to sign official-looking contracts. Often these contracts are in languages that the women do not understand. Once victims have traveled outside their countries, their passports are confiscated. They find themselves abroad, alone, and forced to work either as prostitutes or domestic servants in order to repay their travel expenses. Once the "debt" is paid, the woman may be sold to yet another trafficker, who reinstates a new debt, continuing the cycle. The problem is especially severe in economically stagnant countries where women have the strongest incentives to go abroad in search of work. One study in 1998 estimated that in

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Ukraine alone as many as 400,000 women had either left the country or been trafficked since the collapse of communism.[6]

Central Europe

In Central Europe, USAID is helping to assess the extent of the trafficking problem, particularly in the Balkans, and is working closely with other donors to support women's shelters, to facilitate repatriation, and to promote regional forums on trafficking for governments and NGOs.

Albania. USAID/Albania supports the activities of the International Organization of Migration (IOM) to both return and reintegrate trafficked women, many of whom come from other countries, such as Moldova and Ukraine. This program has assisted two women's shelters that provide temporary protection, social services and reintegration assistance to victims of trafficking. The practical experience and research gained through the project have contributed to a basis for future counter-trafficking initiatives both within Albania and in other source countries.

Romania. USAID/Romania has provided grant money to the Center for Legal Resources, a local NGO, to host a regional forum on trafficking and to develop follow-up action plans for cross-border NGO activity. Through the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, USAID's Office of Women in Development is supporting Labor Resource Centers in three Romanian Cities (Bucharest, Cluj, and Iasi) to increase awareness and understanding regarding child labor, including the trafficking of young girls for prostitution and pornography.

The Former Soviet Union

USAID funds prevention programs in Ukraine and Russia, both significant source countries for traffickers and supports public awareness programs in Central Asia. USAID programs emphasize information and education campaigns and the provision of services to victims. Vocational training for young women at risk and specialized training for professionals who provide support to victims and their families are included. The goal is not only to alert women to the dangers of fraudulent work schemes, but also to train them in marketable skills and strengthen networks of safehouses where trafficked persons and their families can be protected from reprisal.

Russia. USAID/Russia has included anti-trafficking as a core segment of a larger, three-year Democracy Gender Program. This component will develop creative information and education campaigns and will be coordinated with an on-going program to report and prevent domestic violence and provide support to women's crisis centers around the country. The lack of awareness among law enforcement agencies, sexual discrimination and harassment in the workplace are

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[6] International Organization for Migration. July 1998. *Information Campaign Against Trafficking in Women from Ukraine-Research Report*, page 16.

issues common to both the anti-trafficking and domestic violence programs. This work will be informed by an IOM study on the trafficking problem in Russia.

Ukraine. In 1998, USAID/Ukraine launched and continues to support an Anti-Trafficking Initiative, which was the first in the region. An aggressive, multi-sectored approach not only targets NGOs and women's organizations, but also provides young women with job skills training and legal consulting services. The initiative works with local authorities to conduct public education and crisis prevention programs and campaigns in eight trafficking prevention centers throughout the country. A job skills training component at each center provides underemployed young women with basic computer, resume-writing, and job interview skills, as well as walk-in job counseling and life-skills training, free legal consultations and information on sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace. The centers also provide referral services for psychological and medical assistance to returned trafficking victims who are encouraged to provide peer counseling to other women via telephone info-support lines. The centers coordinate with medical/health and law enforcement bodies to protect and rehabilitate former victims as well through cooperation with the global anti-trafficking NGO La Strada, in campaigns targeted at 15-19 year old girls.

A docudrama focusing on trafficking is being televised throughout the country during the summer of 2001. It is aimed at very young women in small towns and rural areas who might not have access to information about trafficking and who are receptive to traffickers' deceptive promises of opportunities overseas.

Central Asia. Anti-trafficking activities in Central Asia focus on increasing public awareness and providing services to victims. Through IOM, USAID supports a multi-faceted anti-trafficking approach, bringing together government officials, civil society organizations, businesses and law enforcement organizations to raise awareness, educate potential victims and implement a preventive action plan for Kyrgyzstan. A similar program is slated for Kazakhstan and will include a public service campaign with telephone hotlines to provide critical information to callers. USAID's Office of Women in Development supported a State Department-sponsored major regional conference in June 2001 in Almaty on trafficking in the five Central Asian countries. The office also is supporting the Kazakhstan anti-trafficking program.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Impoverished children are the most vulnerable population throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. They are often tricked or forced into the commercial sex trade. As the most favored destinations for tourists, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Argentina are at the center of a growing sex tourism industry in Latin American and the Caribbean. Regional conflicts throughout the area compound the trafficking problem and have led to the displacement of thousands of women and children. Latin America

Impoverished children are the most vulnerable population throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. They are often tricked or forced into the commercial sex trade. . . . Regional conflicts throughout the area compound the trafficking problem and have led to the displacement of thousands of women and children. Latin America is also becoming a transit point for trafficked women en route to Europe, North America, and Australia.

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To trick and/or coerce trafficking victims, criminals in Latin America and Caribbean use tactics similar to those employed by traffickers in Europe, the former Soviet Union and Asia. Disguised as employment agencies, traffickers promise impoverished women and children lucrative jobs abroad. The victims are told they will work as domestic servants, waitresses, cooks, or in other service-related industries. Once overseas, however, their passports are taken and they are forced to work under inhumane conditions in order to repay the traffickers' "fee." Victims are often threatened, beaten, and held in seclusion.

The number of victims in Latin American and Caribbean is growing. An estimated 100,000 women and children are trafficked for sexual exploitation annually.[7] Interpol has set the number trafficked out of Colombia each year at 35,000.[8] Other estimates are considerably higher. In response, USAID recently provided support to the Organization of American States (OAS) in partnership with the International Human Rights Law Institute of DePaul University College of Law, to conduct a study on the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation in the Americas. The sixteen countries included in the study are: Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Argentina, Chile, Suriname, and Paraguay. The project aims to arrive at concrete recommendations for action at the domestic, regional and international levels to help address this issue. The report will be presented to the leadership, or General Assembly, of the OAS, as well as to international organizations and national and local NGOs.

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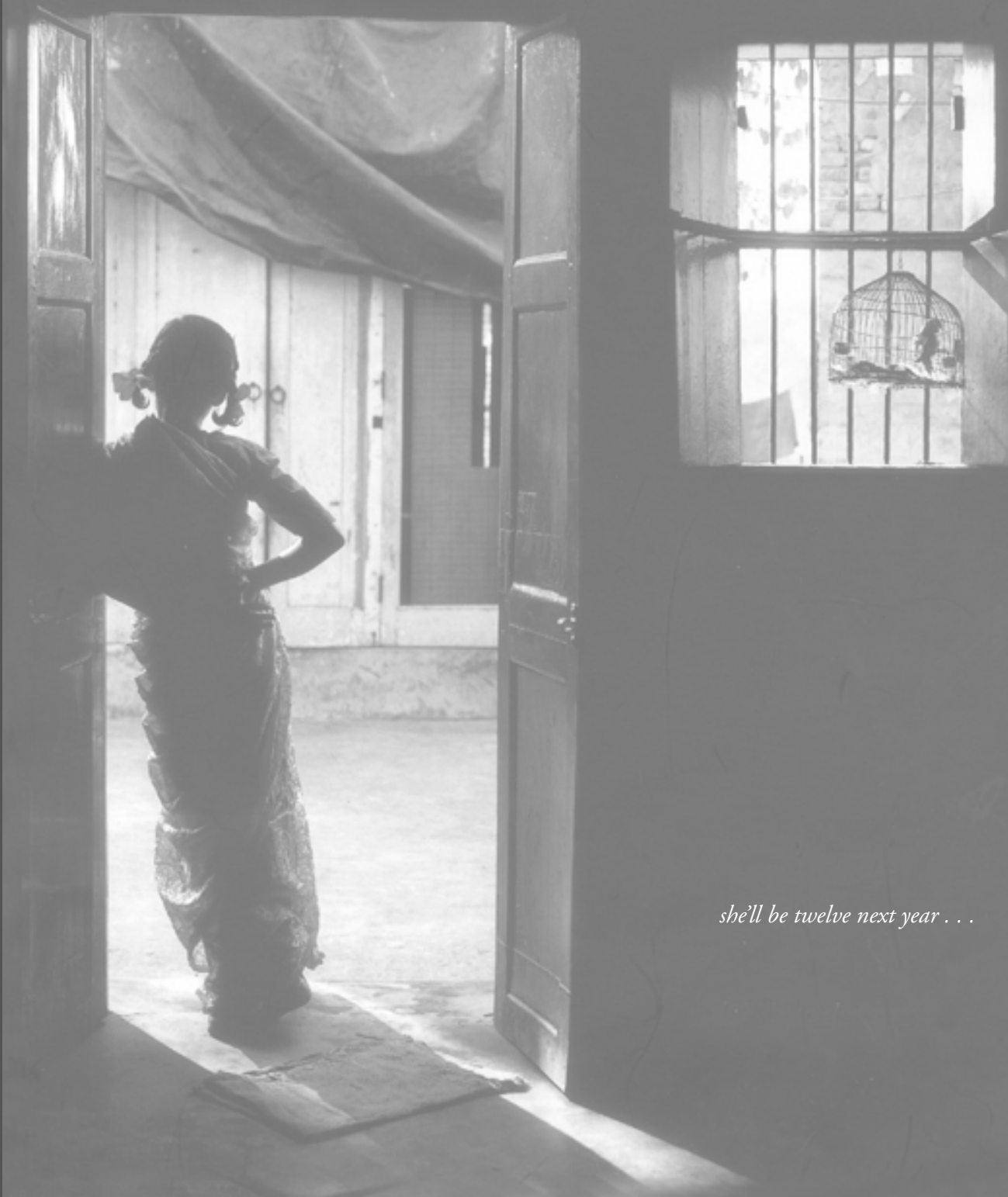
[7] Maki, Francis T., and Grace Park. *Trafficking in Women and Children: The U.S. and International Response.* Congressional Research Service Report 98-649C, May 10, 2000.

[8] Pratt, Timothy, "Sex Slavery Racket a Growing Concern in Latin America," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 11, 2001.

Conclusion

Trafficking of people is an abuse of human rights that is fueled by the vulnerability of women and children, poverty, the demand for cheap commercial sex and labor, local and global criminal networks, corruption, and inadequate legislation and enforcement policies and practices. If trafficking is to be curbed, it will take a multi-pronged and consistent approach with long-term commitment. It will depend on targeted development assistance, governmental commitment and action in source, transit and receiving countries, pro-active non-governmental organizations and law enforcement agencies, and a change in the status of women.

PEOPLE PAY TO HAVE SEX WITH HER



she'll be twelve next year . . .

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