



Statement by PDA Chairman, Mechai Viravaidya May 1, 2007

Announcing the Trafficking Prevention Partnership with Prevent Human Trafficking Institute

Ultimately, the only cure for trafficking is prevention. In Thailand, we have seen that by providing access to education and local income opportunities, women are at a much lower risk to be exploited. Millions of people around the world are exploited as a consequence of a lack of opportunities in the villages; if a woman does not have the opportunity for gainful employment in her village, she may feel enticed by the possibility of higher income and the lure of an exciting life that come from living in a city. In the case of Thailand, many women in the sex industry chose to enter into it because there were not enough opportunities for them to earn money back home; none of them would have chosen to enter this risky field of work if they had the opportunity back home to earn sufficient income to take care of their families. When a jewel-clad person drives into a village in a fancy car and offers deals to the young women that seem too good to be true, if the women do not know any better and have no other options for employment in the village, then of course they are going to take what seems like easy money. Most of us would do the same if we were in their situation. The way to stop this exploitation, thus, is through providing economic opportunities and education in order to empower the women. **This is what the Prevent Human Trafficking Institute - Population and Community Development Association partnership is about: increasing income and access to education to mitigate the risk of exploitation --to nip trafficking in the bud.**

A lot is made of trying to "save" the women once they enter prostitution. This is a nice thought, but knocking down the doors to brothels doesn't work, contrary to popular notions strengthened, sadly, by the media. Many organizations that fight trafficking use this "kick down the door" method because it is easier to do than prevention and makes a nicer report for their donors and for media (filled with pictures of contrite brothel owners being carted off to prison and happy women back in their villages, safe from these evil men now that the men have been locked up behind bars). Time and time again, unfortunately, we see that these women simply end up back in the brothels - many times treated even worse than before by the very same brothel owners who were supposed to be in jail.

To understand how this happens, you have to understand how these women ended up in the establishment in the first place. Certainly, around the world, many women have been kidnapped, but more often than not women chose to enter the trade or were sold into the sex industry by their families. In the former case, it is likely that the woman would choose to go back to the establishment or at least into the same line of work; in the latter case, however, what does it mean to have a contractual obligation between a trafficker and the woman's family? Though the contract is not legally binding

in a court of law, families know better than to cross the traffickers; these "saved" women know that if they do not return to the brothel to work, the brothel owner will go to their village and their younger sister or cousin would then have the burden of completing the contract that her parents signed. So what we see on TV and what happens after the cameras go away are two completely different things; most of the time, the brothel owners get by with just a slap on the wrist and a broken front door, free to reclaim their lost workers and be back in business within a few weeks.

Another thing about this "saviour method" is that, regardless of what is going on in a country, foreigners do not have the right to forcefully impose their morals upon a sovereign nation; imagine if I did not like the fact that Americans have the right to own handguns and went over to West Virginia and busted down the doors of people with guns. I guarantee you that your government would not stand for it. This is exactly what is going on in Thailand with American organizations intent on "saving" these women. Obviously, I condemn the exploitation of any person, but we must not try to "fix" the problem with an easy - yet temporary and shortsighted - solution. Long-term solutions are needed to combat trafficking and exploitation before it even begins to take shape in each individual case. Economic and social conditions in the communities must be improved so that young women will know better than to take a chance with some stranger, and will not have to do so because they already have a good job right there in their communities.

Again, prevention is the best cure for trafficking, and opportunity is the best way to enable effective, sustainable prevention.

Yours Sincerely,

Mechai Viravaidya
Chairman, PDA