A red card for hype on World Cup trafficking story
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When I read the op/ed, entitled *Soccer with a Side of Slavery*, in Saturday's *Washington Post* I had to respond. As the Director of a sister anti-trafficking organization Project HOPE International, based in Washington, DC, I am concerned that the alarmist rhetoric contained in Polaris Project co-founders, Chon and Ellerman's piece does a disservice to real victims of trafficking. They have suggested
that the World Cup of soccer will draw unbelievably high numbers of sex trafficking victims to Germany, and that Germany has not taken proper precautions
to prevent this tragedy. The reality of the situation is, however, far less sensational.

Chon and Ellerman claim that about 40,000 women and children will be trafficked into sex work for the World Cup. This figure is no doubt vastly overblown. There is, in fact, no evidence to suggest that trafficking victims will be imported into Germany in large numbers. It seems that this estimate originated with unsubstantiated statements made by a few anti-trafficking groups which, though they have no basis in reality, have somehow gained legitimacy through repetition.[1] Some quick math shows that this number is no doubt vastly overblown.

As the UNESCO trafficking statistics project points out, no conclusive figures exist on the global scope of human trafficking. The State Department estimates that 600,000-800,000 individuals worldwide are trafficked annually and that 80% of these victims are female.[2] "Were this figure correct," notes Dr. David Feingold, Director of UNESCO anti-trafficking programs in Bangkok, Thailand, and if, as Chon and Ellerman claim, 40,000 females will be trafficked to service soccer fans, "the World cup will be responsible for 6.25% of this year's trafficking in female persons!"[3] Considering that trafficking in women occurs in almost every country, it is highly improbable that Germany would have such a monopoly on this illicit activity.

A bit of number crunching on the demand side produces similar results. Three million fans, not all of whom are male, are projected to visit Germany for the World Cup. Considering that the trafficked women will be joined by thousands of legal and voluntary sex workers registered with the German government, there are simply not enough men to seek the services of an additional 40,000 trafficking victims.

Petra Burcikova, the national coordinator for La Strada, a pan-European anti-trafficking organization, sums up the implausibility of this figure. She says, "I think the guys who are coming to watch the championship would not have time to watch any games because they would have to be engaged in having sex with all of those prostitutes all of the time."[4]

[1] An article from Women's enews says that the estimate originated with the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women [http://www.catwinternational.org/] and the European Parliament. The article entitled, *Activists Blow Trafficking Whistle on World Cup*, can be found at http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm?aid=2768.

[2] From the 2006 TIP report, which can be found at http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2006/65983.htm

[3] Dr. David Feingold of UNESCO, Thailand and Ophidian Films gave this estimate.

In addition to exaggerating the scope of trafficking to the World Cup, Chon and Ellerman imply that the German government German government has failed to address the supposed influx of trafficked sex workers. However, Germany is generally lauded as having one of the world's best anti-trafficking responses in the world. According to the State Department's 2006 Trafficking in Persons Report, the German government has allocated over $5.4 million to anti-trafficking organizations in the past three years.[5]

Since the beginning of the Trafficking in Persons report, The State Department has consistently ranked Germany a Tier I country because it "fully complies with minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, including making serious and sustained efforts to eliminate severe forms of trafficking with respect to law enforcement, protection of victims, and prevention of trafficking."[6]

In the months prior to the commencement of the World Cup, Germany took several steps to stem the baseless projected increase in trafficking victims. For instance, the 2006 Trafficking in Persons Report states that Germany has improved victim-screening mechanisms and police safeguards against trafficking.[7] A recent article in Foreign Policy also cites the German government's increased anti-trafficking efforts, saying, "The German government is restricting visas from East European countries such as Ukraine and Belarus for the duration of the tournament and stepping up police raids on German brothels, looking for illegal immigrants and evidence of coercion."[8] Clearly, Germany has committed substantial financial and human resources to preventing sex trafficking, which, unlike prostitution, is illegal in that country.

Perhaps Chon and Ellerman's misguided concern about sex trafficking to the World Cup results from the all too common conflation of prostitution and trafficking. Since asserted links between trafficking and prostitution are tenuous at best, it is important to make a distinction between the two issues. Trafficking results from poverty, powerlessness and limited economic options. The supply of trafficking victims is driven far more by these factors than by temporary fluctuations in demand for sex workers arising from sporting events. There is no instantaneous, market-clearing process that responds to short-term shifts in demand. Prostitution is not synonymous with sex trafficking.

That trafficking victims make headlines is an accomplishment for the anti-trafficking movement. However, the current hype around sex trafficking at the World Cup diverts attention from and thereby and misses the goal of broadening public awareness about human trafficking and stopping it where it really exists. The truth is that the vast majority of trafficking victims are duped then forced into exploitative labor; this includes agricultural, domestic, manufacturing, and, yes, sex work. Victims of sex and labor trafficking alike are exploited at work in extreme situations rooted in complex social, economic, political, and historical conditions. To stand on the side of the oppressed, we must focus time, energy, and resources based on honest numbers and rhetoric free from diversionary and sensational hyperbole.

[4] Quoted from, *Activists Blow Trafficking Whistle on World Cup*, which can be found at http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm?aid=2768. The La Strada website is http://www.strada.cz/en.

[5] TIP 2006, Germany, http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2006/65988.htm
[6] Ibid
[7] Ibid
[8] Curry, John. "Soccer's Sex Slaves." *Foreign Policy*. May/June 2006.

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