

## 2002 Youth Town Newspaper

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### **Trafficking and Slavery: Tough themes challenge high school students**

By Alexandra Moffitt

On Wednesday, January 9, 2002, nearly 650 San Diego and Tijuana high school students learned the answer to the question “Who Will Open the Cages?” at the fifth annual WorldLink Youth Town Meeting held at The University of San Diego’s Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice. “We are here to tackle problems confronting our world in an adult manner” stated the first moderator, SamSam Ali of Kennedy High School.

Speakers included Department of State officials, non-governmental agency representatives, former ambassadors, and university professors. The intriguing metaphor of the conference’s title refers to opening the cages of injustice for the victims of human trafficking, slavery, and child labor. The attendees of last year’s conference voted upon the topic.

This was the first official event held in The Institute for Peace and Justice following its dedication, and it was headed by a mass volunteer effort. Dee Aker, Ph.D., director of WorldLink, was in charge of booking speakers. The topic of the conference was somewhat difficult for the adults to handle so speakers were hard to come by, but Aker encouraged the students to “join us, teach us, work with us.”

Laura Barnitz, head of the Youth Advocate Program International and author of *Commercial, Sexual Exploitation of Children*, was “quite sober to talk about today’s topic.” She spoke of the use of child soldiers, prostitutes, and laborers, focusing on human trafficking as “the most heinous abuse of human beings ever seen.” Barnitz defined children and youth as “the most vulnerable of the victim. “Over 700 children were trafficked to San Diego this year from all parts of the world, and “we are now aware of something not talked about years ago: modern day slavery.

Excerpts from the films *So Deep a Violence* by the Coalition Against Trafficking of Women and *The Selling of Innocents* by Ruchira Gupta were shown; they told the story of girls as young as nine years old being sold as sex slaves. Rescued girls, infested with diseases, sexual and otherwise, lamented, “All we want is to get back home.”

According to Ambassador Nancy Ely-Raphael, director of the U.S. State Department’s Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons and former Ambassador to Slovenia, “more than 700,000 people worldwide, mostly women and children, are trafficked annually across international borders against their will or through deception, and as many as 50,000 people are smuggled into the United States.”

Ely-Raphael feels that trafficking has persisted globally into the twenty-first century due to political instability, civil war, and an overall lack of responsibility on the part of the

human race. She reminded attendants that the struggle against repression and exploitation continues.

Attorney and human rights advocate Lilia Velazquez, answered the questions “Can the cages be opened, can the children be saved?” She fervently exclaimed, “This gross violation of human rights deserves repetition.” Velazquez believes that trafficking has become overly prominent due to globalization and the new found Internet sex industry. Supply and demand, the “basic rule of economics,” allows this problem to continue in existence.

To the question “Is this [prostitution] a choice?” Velazquez answered, “No! How can anyone argue when there is such a high rate of suicide?”

Reina, a 16-year-old girl who was brought from Mexico and forced into prostitution in San Diego County, told her story at the main briefing session of the conference. Her attorney, Velazquez, translated for her.

When she was 14, Reina’s 22-year-old boyfriend promised her a job in America. He put her baby under his sister’s care in Mexico and took her to an Oceanside “sex camp.” Reina was smuggled across the border and forced to work for a prostitution ring that catered to Mexican migrant workers and operated in vacant fields. Her pimp threatened to harm her one-year-old son if she did not cooperate.

Last summer, after being beaten by her pimp because she refused to work, Reina went to a neighbor’s house, and they called the police. The investigation led to the dismantling last month of a large prostitution ring that operated in secluded camps in North County. Reina’s cooperation with authorities helped rescue her son from his captors in Mexico. “People need to be aware so that the same thing that happened to me doesn’t happen to others,” Reina said.

Attendants were also shown film clips from *Carpet Slaves*, *Stolen Children of India*, which explained that these victims “can’t go to the police because of [the police] are part of [the problem]!” According to speakers, these problems are only getting worse. Free trade, established so that goods and services can flow freely, is actually one of the causes of slave labor. We need an equitable system because we are now favoring the rich nations who can go out and take advantage of desperately poor people. The promotion of these children’s basic rights needs to be implemented. It is a question of health, not just economics.

Human trafficking, slavery, and child labor are inhumane and unacceptable. “We cannot close our eyes because it’s too painful to see and to understand.” “Ignorance is bliss. You are no longer ignorant.” “We cannot ever completely eradicate the problem but our conscience demands that we do everything we can to stop it.”

To help, students can support poverty alleviation programs, volunteer at community outreach centers spread the word, and be on the alert -“this can take place right in your

own backyard.” Students can also follow the strategy of the three P’s: Preventions of trafficking, Prosecution of traffickers, and Protection of Victims. No matter their age, sex, or country of citizenship, we need to promote the well being of people. For more information, please visit [www.yapi.org](http://www.yapi.org) .

## **Conferencia Worldlink: un vistazo al mundo real**

By Marcela Loaiza y Eva Chavez

El pasado 9 de enero del 2002 se llevó a cabo una conferencia de interés general de en las instalaciones de la Universidad de San Diego (USD); en la cual se discutieron temas sobre la prostitución de menores, la esclavitud y el tráfico de humanos.

La conferencia dio inicio en el teatro de la Universidad donde se presentó una introducción a los temas ya mencionados y se mostraron video con escenas reveladoras sobre el abuso que se les da alas mujeres y niños no solo en países tercer mundistas, si no también en los países desarrollados como Estados Unidos. El problema los casos se dan en un nivel social bajo, pero la información obtenida por los conferencistas fue otra.

En seguida se procedió a la división por grupos que se trasladaron al un edificio con diferentes salas donde se llevaron a cabo pláticas con diferentes expertos de los temas a tratar.

Cabe mencionar entre ellos el más destacado: “La prostitución de menores” en el cual se presentaron casos verídicos de víctimas que fueron afectadas física y psicológicamente. Llevando más haya de las palabras los puntos referentes al tema., haciendo las sesiones muy interesantes, ya que se nos permitió interactuar y opinar sobre los casos expuestos.

Se nos dio a conocer que una de las razones por las que se daban estas situaciones era por la falta de trabajo en países pobres y con personas que tienden a ser engañadas como pueden ser los niños, las mujeres jóvenes y familias sobres que viven en la ignorancia, donde los traficantes aprovechan de estas circunstancias para hacerles propuestas llamativas del trabajo ó simplemente amenazando a los familiares de las víctimas. El trato de éstas es tan cruel que provocan hasta la muerte. Las mujeres son traídas de todas partes del mundo y prostituirlas.

Al terminar la primera parte de las platicas se nos dio un receso en el cual disfrutamos de un almuerzo nutritivo totalmente gratuito.

Regresamos a nuestras aulas asignadas donde se continuó la exposición sobre la prostitución. La sesión más importante fue donde se presentó a una mujer que se prostutía en un “sex camp”<sup>1</sup> en donde las mujeres eran constantemente expuestas a humillaciones y violaciones por hombres que buscaban prostitutas baratas. Esa mujer jugó un papel muy importante en un caso policiaco en contra de estos casos obscenos, ya que aportó a la policía información muy caliosa. Aparte ella es un vivo ejemplo de superación personal para miles de mujeres y niños que se encuentran en la situación en la que ella estaba. Después nos retiramos de nuevo al teatro donde se dio una breve explicación de los que es el esclavismo y de ahí se dieron a conocer las ideas principales vistas a lo largo del día.

En conclusión, a nosotros como estudiantes, se nos dio a conocer la triste realidad que estamos viviendo, para que nosotros podamos prevenir este tipo de hechos por lo menos en nuestra comunidad y para no temer a dar el primer paso para combatir esta adversidad mundial.

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<sup>1</sup> “sex camp”. Es un campo o terreno baldío donde, durante todo el día mujeres se prostituyen en colchones tirados sobre la tierra.