



CHILD PROSTITUTION

The Ultimate Abuse

Report on
The National Consultation on Child Prostitution

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November 18-20, 1995, New Delhi

Organised by YMCA, ECPAT and UNICEF

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PLAY

Hum bhi bachchen hain

A group of working children performed a play in the opening session of the Consultation. The play was organised by BUTTERFLIES, a group working among street and working children.

The play opened with the distribution of press reports on child prostitution. "Today's News", the children said as they handed a copy to each member of the audience. It was a sensitive portrayal of the vulnerability of a child in an inhuman and exploitative society – when he is sold by his own father to the agent, when the agent in turn sells him to a contractor for labour, when shoeshine boys are lured by foreign tourists. The child is at risk at work, a victim of abuse on the streets and with the tourists on the beaches of Goa. "Please do think about us. We are also children like your children. We are not things for your enjoyment," they implored.

Child prostitution: The ultimate denial of the rights of the child

THE EMINENT FRENCH JURIST, RENEE Bridet, said of prostituted children that "even if they are alive, they are dying within".

It is a sad commentary on the social values of modern society that we can permit more than one million children in prostitution in Asia alone to remain in a form of slavery which is akin to a living death, said Ron O'Grady of End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly lays down the role of the state in the protection of the child in Article 34, where it notes that the state will undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. Articles 35 and 36 state that all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures will be taken by the state to prevent abduction, sale and traffick in children, coercion to engage in unlawful sexual activity, and all forms of exploitation such as prostitution or pornographic performances. It also states that all children must receive the opportunity to discover their identity and realize their self-worth in a safe and supportive environment. But when a child is sexually exploited, what is denied is his or her childhood.

The very basis of the child sex industry – designating of a child as a commodity for sale and purchase – demeans and dehumanises the child. It also serves the sexual drive of sexually immature men who seek emotional release by exploiting a completely powerless slave child.

The sexual exploitation of children does not occur in a vacuum but involves a more widespread exploitation, sexual or otherwise. Poverty and ignorance are the underlying causes of this world-wide phenomenon, as families rely on their youngest members to contribute to the household income. The child in prostitution is a victim of paedophiles who pose as tourists, and of traffickers who force them into this trade.

Child prostitution is a term in popular usage but is inaccurate because it implies consent. And a child does not consent. He/she is rather victimised into sexual slavery.

All over the world, the child's vulnerability to commercial sexual exploitation lies in his or her family circumstances. The majority of sexually exploited children are either from marginalised families in the cities, and destitute families in the country, or children of women already in the sex industry.

In India, systems of child prostitution as varied as the Devadasi or the Jogini, and the trafficking system that moves young girls across south Asia and into urban centres, reveal the active exploitation and the socio-economic realities that make such exploitation possible. In the last few years, some instances of sexual abuse of children have also come to light in popular tourist destinations.

About 85 per cent of the prostitutes in Delhi and Calcutta were compelled into the trade when very young, entertaining about seven to eight clients in one day. Often during heavy menstrual periods, ice is used and they are forced to receive clients. Physical or psychological torture may be specifically employed to ensure compliance in many cases.

Dr John Rhode, UNICEF representative in India, in his opening speech observed that with the exception of outright death, child prostitution is the ultimate denial of the rights of the child transforming his entire life. Any society that tolerates this cannot afford to call itself civilised.

In India there are some myths that make men seek young girls, believing that sex with virgins can cure sexually transmitted diseases, implying that younger sex workers are less likely to carry HIV. On the contrary, a child's immature body and inadequately developed immune systems make her more susceptible to sexually transmitted and other diseases.

The Swedish government has agreed to host the first World Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, in Stockholm from August 27 to 31, 1996. The Congress will deal with three areas mentioned in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): child prostitution, child pornography and trafficking in children.

What are the causes that drive a family to send their child into the sex trade or entrust them to the agents of this trade? What role can the media, the NGOs, the police play in eliminating this exploitation? What are the challenges in rehabilitation of these children? These were some of the issues that were dealt with in the national consultation on child prostitution, organised by ECPAT, YMCA and UNICEF from November 18 to 20, at the Heinz Auditorium, YMCA, New Delhi, India. NGOs, academicians, researchers, lawyers, the media, and the police were invited to address this workshop. ■

Child prostitutes: Victims of discrimination

THE CHILDREN OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES and ethnic minorities are especially vulnerable to trafficking. They often do not share the language, educational access, or even the right to citizenship of the majority population. So they lack the economic opportunities, the knowledge and the rights which could help protect them from traffickers and pimps. (*ECPAT report on Child Sexual Exploitation*)

Mr O'Grady remarked that in India, there has been for a long time a denial of the existence of child prostitution. The tendency is to sweep it under the carpet. It embarrasses the nation to admit it. The vehemence of the denial is evidence of society's recognition of its horror. We cannot wish it away.

Dr K.K. Mukhopadhyay from Delhi School of Social Work, University of Delhi, in his presentation based on the surveys he has conducted for the Government of India, said that young girls in India were taken away from their parents in poor backward and drought affected districts of the country for purposes of trafficking. These were also states with gender inequality and low literacy rates. The trafficking network was well organised in these areas. He found in his survey that about eighty per cent of the girls who were in this profession entered it as children and due to difficult circumstances, such as poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, and deception. The increasingly consumerist society only further complicated the situation.

Children are often hired out or sold by their families to agents who may or may not reveal the true nature of the work offered. The agent may promise a job as a domestic servant or factory worker at a wage many times higher than is customary in rural areas. Economic conditions vary widely within poor countries, so a story of highly paid, unskilled work in a far off town is sometimes plausible to a family with no experience of urban labour. Debt bondage is also common. A sum of money which is large in the eyes of the family, may be handed

over to them, and the child obligated to work to pay off the debt. Some young girls are deceived by young urban boys who go to villages. The boys conduct fake marriages with these girls, bring them to the cities and sell them to the brothels.

Contributing to vulnerability everywhere is the absence of an adequate social and economic safety net to catch families or children in difficulty before they are caught by the sex industry.

In his analysis, Dr Mukhopadhyay argues that child prostitution may be caused by an interplay of factors, but is essentially a developmental problem and cannot be looked at in isolation as an economic or social problem. About two thirds of the total Hindu girl prostitutes interviewed by him were from the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward castes.

Madan Modi, Fellow of Child Relief and You (CRY), Udaipur, Rajasthan, noted that in the last few years sexual abuse of children had increased considerably, and every tenth child in India was sexually abused. The number of such cases that the police had registered had steadily increased, as the figures show:

20,194 (1990), 20,611 (1991), 20,385 (1992), 20,911 (1993)
21,422 (1994), 21,500 (till October, 1995)

He mentioned that child abuse was rampant on the national highway between Udaipur and Gujarat. The villages in this region were backward and under developed, and illiteracy was high.

The preponderance of girl prostitutes from Nepal and Bangladesh can be attributed to prevailing abject poverty and ignorance in both these countries in comparison to India. When Mukhopadhyay interviewed one of the young girl prostitutes of Nepali origin about why they came to India, she said, "In our country, it is not easy to get employment. Our economic situation is very bad. It is not easy even to get two square meals a day. Many come to India in search of employment, income and other opportunities."

Any discussion on child prostitution in India is incomplete without talking about how and why young minor girls are brought from Nepal to the brothels in India. In his presentation, Gauri Pradhan of Child Workers In Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN), Kathmandu, Nepal, said there was hardly any brothel here where Nepali girls were not found.

In a study conducted by Women's Rehabilitation Centre of Kathmandu on girls of Nepali origin in Bombay brothels, more than half of the respondents cited poverty and unemployment as the reason for prostitution. In addition, the girls

said, they were deceived by village men and relatives (popularly known as Gallawals) after being informally married to them, or after being convinced by the prospect of a better job in the cities.

Mr Pradhan disclosed that there were some districts in Nepal, like Sindupalchuk, Newca Kot, and Makawanpur in particular, that had direct links with brothels in Bombay.

Two out of every three girls in Nepal are deprived of education due to socio-cultural and economic reasons. Malnutrition among girls is higher than among boys. Of the total child labour force, 61 per cent are girls. Each year five to seven thousand girls and women are trafficked into India and other countries for prostitution, and 20 per cent of them are under the age of 16. In rape cases over the last five years, 60 percent of the victims have been young girls and minors.

In the several questions raised on the poverty factor. Dr Jai Singh remarked economic hardship as the main reason behind child prostitution, and girls being pushed back in to the trade by the parents even after they were rescued.

Mr Grady responded by asking, "how much is a child worth? Even if poverty is the driving force, is it worth telling your child to go into prostitution, which is almost certain death. It is not just poverty. Why does one poor family sell children to prostitution and another doesn't? These are ethical issues. It is about valuing one's child. Is it such a low valuing of a child that you would let them go through the suffering, because you as a parent wish to buy a TV?"

A point was made by a former police officer that he had often observed drugs like heroin being used to hook the girls, and once they were addicted to it, they were forced into prostitution to earn money. Dr Mukhopadhyay noted that while drugs was one way to hook them to a life of prostitution, pregnancy was another.

HE ADDED THAT INDISCRIMINATE growth and development of slums contributed to the sex trade. When men migrate to the cities for jobs, they are forced to live without their wives and family support. He felt that there was a need to stop this migration by redistribution of industries and commercial centres and providing adequate housing. "Why let the slums grow?" he asked. Since girls are picked up from rural and backward areas, efforts to limit trafficking should be linked with effective rural development programmes in those regions which are the main supply centres of prostitutes.

The Government of India's Central Advisory Committee consisting of government officials and representatives from NGOs, first attempted to assess the magnitude of child prostitution, and found no reliable statistics either on the number of prostitutes in the country, or the number of child

prostitutes. However, the NGOs' estimates indicate that roughly 12.15 per cent of the prostitutes are child prostitutes. The survey conducted by the Central Social Welfare Board (1991) in six cities of the country (red light areas), found:

1. Most prostitutes (86 per cent) come from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.
2. The total population of prostitutes in the country is between 70,000 to 100,000.
3. About 30 per cent of them are below the age of 20.
4. Nearly 15 per cent enter the profession before the age of 15, and 25 per cent enter between 15 and 18 years.
5. Economic distress is the major reason for entering the profession.
6. 2.6 per cent of India's prostitutes are Nepalis, and 2.17 per cent Bangladeshis.
7. Around 60 per cent of the prostitutes belong to the scheduled castes, tribes and backward classes.
8. Illiteracy is high (71 per cent).
9. Families of prostitutes are mostly unemployed or engaged in unskilled labour (74 per cent).
10. Prostitutes generally have one or two children.
11. 58 per cent of the children of prostitutes go to school.
12. Problems identified with children of prostitutes include absence of the father, economic hardship, unhealthy social environment and ill health.
13. Rehabilitation appears to involve behaviour correction, the assurance of steady income, marriage, housing and family acceptance. ■

Where does this problem begin? The child is prostituted with the collusion of his or her family, who may be tricked into letting their child go. And some street children may be taken in by an adult who will gain their trust before insisting that the child take in clients to earn her food and lodging. In some cases children are simply snatched whilst playing outside.

A study on girl children in prostitution in Kamathipura, Mumbai

THE CONTINUED SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN for commercial gain can no longer be hidden. The issue has now been brought out into the light of day where people can stare directly at it and see the potential for evil and horror and destruction which is always there in the heart of society. (Clarence Shubert, Senior Advisor of UNICEF for Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances, at an ECPAT conference)

In his presentation, Mr O'Grady pointed out the problems of finding reliable data on the subject of child prostitution. Governments sometimes have a vested interest in making the figure seem less than it really is, while at the other end there are sensation-seeking journalists and agencies who want to draw attention to the problem by asserting that the number of children involved is much higher than the facts suggest.

Allowing for a fairly large margin of error, he said we could still claim some validity for the belief that there were at least 1,000,000 children in prostitution in Asia. Of the 1,000,000 Asian children in prostitution, the largest number is probably found in India or China. The most comprehensive survey by the Government of India suggests that at least 25,000 children are in prostitution in the six main cities alone (Delhi, Calcutta, Mumbai, Madras, Bangalore and Hyderabad). *India Today* magazine in 1990 quoted a figure of 500,000 minors in prostitution.

At the consultation, the findings of two surveys were presented that threw light on the extent and intensity of the problem in India.

Synopsis of the Micro-study on Girl Children in Prostitution in Kamathipura, Mumbai (Study by PRERNA, Mumbai), follows:

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

To portray as accurate a picture as possible of the girls associated with the sex trade, data was collected from two primary sources – young sex workers and young daughters of sex workers – using the following methods:

1. In-depth personal interviews were conducted with young female sex workers (while the selected average age was 15 to 18 years, the girls who were actually available for the interview fell into the age range of 17 to 22 years). The data, conforming to a structured questionnaire, yielded both qualitative as well as quantitative information. However, the interviews were actually conducted informally to gain the confidence of those being interviewed, and the responses were recorded later. The interviews with brothel-based sex workers were conducted inside the brothels.

Keeping in mind the inter-country implications of the sex-trade in Bombay, a good proportion of Nepali girls was included in the study sample. 11 Nepali girls and 20 Indian girls were interviewed.

2. Focus-group interviews were conducted with the daughters of sex workers. The two age categories selected were 11 to 14 and 15 to 18 years. In all, 49 daughters of prostitutes were interviewed, four of whom were already practising prostitution.

The participants in the focus groups shared common characteristics of age, sex, mother's background and life style. Focus groups were used, as it was felt they would encourage the young girls to speak more freely about themselves without fear of being judged, and thus provide the necessary information for determining programme decisions. 10 focus-group interviews were conducted with an average of five children in each group.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE PERSONAL INTERVIEWS WITH CHILD PROSTITUTES

1. The families of the girls are very poor and unable to provide well for the children. They are rural based and often reside in remote areas. The parents are often illiterates. Many of the girls come from large families. A good number of the girls in prostitution come from disfunctional families where there is either no father (being dead, or having deserted the family), or he is not effective (being alcoholic, or having no steady employment), or the mother is a prostitute. In some cases there is also a sister in the family who is a prostitute. Brothel-based girls are unlikely to have much contact with their families.
2. Most of the girls are themselves illiterate.

3. The age of becoming a prostitute was under 18 years for 90.3 per cent of the girls (16 years was the average age).
4. The reasons for joining the profession mostly include deception about a job, in addition to desperate circumstances. Some of the girls are deceived by promises of marriage, and then led into prostitution.
5. The number of clients ranges from two to seven per night, which drastically pushes the chances of being infected by HIV. The girls are already complaining of frequent STD infections.
6. Older Nepali prostitutes say that young Nepali prostitutes suffering from HIV infection have been deported to Nepal with the collaboration of the police.
7. Most of the brothel-based girls do not have any direct access to their earnings. Most of them are indebted to the brothel keeper for the cost of their living expenses. These girls live almost as bonded labourers.
8. The living conditions of the brothel-based sex workers are pathetic : they are crowded, unhygienic – with shortage of water and insufficient number of toilets.
9. Over half of the respondents expressed their desire to leave this profession, but also expressed their helplessness and their inability to do so.
10. Beer bars where the waitresses also work as independent prostitutes, are drawing girls from low socio-economic backgrounds looking for remunerative employment. Girls from Bombay slums who had been sexually abused, or had worked in brothels, or whose mothers were prostitutes, are working in this type of set-up.
11. Some of these minor girls in prostitution already have a child, and many of them have aborted their pregnancies. However, many of the girls also expressed their desire to have a child.
12. None of the girls trust the police to help them in any way. They say that the police expect bribes or sexual favours from them.
13. None of the girls have confidence in politicians, but some of them said that social workers were helpful.

AGE CATEGORISATION OF THE FOCUS GROUPS

Category of the Group	Age Group	No. of Groups	No. of Girls
A	11-14 years	6	32
B	15-18 years	4	17
TOTAL	11-18 years	10	49

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FOCUS-GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH THE CHILDREN OF PROSTITUTES

1. Twelve out of the 49 children of prostitutes were motherless. 40 said that they have or had illiterate mothers. Most are unaware of their mothers' daily income. The number of siblings range from one to three. More female siblings than male were reported. The older siblings of some are already in prostitution or working in beer bars. Relatives in native place were mentioned but few had contact with them, and only two having visited.
2. The majority of the children in category A (the younger category) go to school. In category B many have dropped out, only one is presently studying and three are reappearing for X and XII class examinations since they had failed. The fact that many of the younger children are going to school, and that some of the older ones are reappearing for exams, may largely be because all but six of the respondents are members of PRERNA (the agency that conducted the interviews). It is very difficult for children of prostitutes to pursue studies without this type of external assistance. (Four groups in category A said that they benefitted from the Educational Support Programme (ESP) of PRERNA).
3. When the drop-outs who were not studying in category B were asked whether they would like to go to school if given an opportunity, all except one answered in the negative. Reasons given for dropping out were economic problems, dislike of school or lack of interest on the part of the child. One economic reason given by some was that the mother wanted the child to become a prostitute. Reasons for disliking school included insults and scoldings from the teachers.
4. The adult occupation roles liked most by category A were teachers and social workers followed by nurses.
5. The children in category A said that they wanted to study hard and get out of Kamathipura.
6. Five girls in category B are married. Of these, one is separated, and another has an unwanted pregnancy and a bad marriage.
7. When working girls were asked whether they would like to continue with their present work, two out of the three prostitutes said "no", while the two bar workers said "yes".
8. TB and STDs (the latter for those practising prostitution) were major health problems recorded. It was also reported that long term health problems such as TB did

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- not get proper attention.
9. Of the responses expressed about the customers of the prostitutes by the children, the feeling of hatred was predominant, and a few respondents have also admitted that young girls are subjected to humiliating remarks by the customers. Some school-going children said that they disliked staying at home (in the brothel) during vacations.
 10. Besides sympathy for their mother and dislike for their mother's work, some of the children denied that their mothers worked as prostitutes.
 11. The working girls (bar girl, Annapurna, for instance) said that their employers knew about their background, but the behaviour of the employer was not affected by this.
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The child and the paedophile tourist

establish relationships with local families in poor areas to facilitate access to children. Others have set up guesthouses or orphanages where they offer services to visiting members of their networks. As the technology becomes cheaper, the photographing and videotaping of children engaged in sexual acts is on the increase. An operation based in a small flat in Bangkok supplied child pornography to over 200 clients worldwide.

The tourist sex industry in Taiwan serves mainly Japanese and Korean men. The Thai sex industry is estimated to be worth over one billion pounds per year, servicing both Thai and foreign visitors. The estimates of the number of sexually exploited children vary from 20,000 to 800,000.

In India, the demand for children comes mainly from the local population. However, India and other South Asian countries are slowly replacing South East Asia as the venue of choice for foreigners, as there are fewer laws against child sexual abuse, and South Asian children can be bought more cheaply. Another reason is the belief among European tourists that AIDS in India is not as rampant as it is in South East Asia.

It has been acknowledged that a larger number of sex tourists are now seeking out India, but the problem has not yet reached the dimensions of the trade in South East Asia. The main destination in India for tourists seeking child prostitutes is Goa, with its combination of beaches and lax security at the airport for chartered flights. A case involving a child abuser in Goa was widely reported in 1990. Brother Freddy Peat was arrested on suspicion of involvement in sadistic and homosexual activities and child abuse. Brother Peat had claimed to have been running an 'orphanage'. Photographs of children in the nude were seized along-with syringes, sedatives and aphrodisiacs. He is alleged to have supplied little boys to German, French, British, Swiss and Scandinavian tourists. He is the only offender to have been put on trial in India, as most offenders are never even booked.

The recent trial in Stockholm, Sweden, is one indication of how Goa is fast outrivalling Bangkok as the new sex capital for paedophiles. When Lena Perned and her lover were put on trial along with 18 others, most of them disclosed that they had chosen Goa over Bangkok because the Thai capital had become "too hot". Another popular destination appears to be Kovalam in Kerala. A German tourist was recently caught in the act but managed to bribe his way out.

Although the volume of traffic was not significant compared to Thailand and Philippines, Interpol was keeping an eye on the traffic in the area.

In a country like Sri Lanka for example, child prostitution was virtually unknown until recently, but with the growth of tourism in that island, the number of child prostitutes increased dramatically and would have been even greater had

AN IRONY OF THE TOURIST SEX INDUSTRY IN all its manifestations is that the poverty which drives a child to offer sex for money, offers the sex tourist an easy opportunity to expiate guilt. By paying for a child's services, he can convince himself that he is helping her and her family to escape economic hardship. (*ECPAT report on child sexual exploitation*)

"In 1990, a group of Asian researchers first exposed the degree to which child prostitution was increasing in many Asian countries. When they reported their findings to a consultation in May of that year, the participants were astonished to realise the size of the problem, and their amazement was compounded when they found that part of the reason for the increase was the number of western paedophiles and sex tourists creating the demand for such children." (From Ron O'Grady's book, *The Rape of the Innocent*)

Researchers claim that there are at least 1,000,000 children in prostitution in Asia. "By any standard this is an unacceptable figure. It is unacceptable to the countries where child prostitution occurs, and it is unacceptable to the many other countries whose citizens are among those creating the demand for children as sexual partners," observes Mr O'Grady.

The rapid growth of tourism during the 1970s and 1980s has coincided in several countries with the emergence or expansion of the child sex industry. According to the World Tourism Organisation, tourism will be the world's largest industry by the year 2000. Irene Fellizar, working with children in the Philippines, observes: "If already there is a demand locally, when foreign paedophiles come here, they increase the demand. And their presence sort of legitimises the practice."

Many child abusers are known to have settled in South East Asia. Some come as businessmen or retirees, and will

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not the civil war limited the number of tourists entering the country. PEACE, a non-governmental organisation working in this area, has estimated from studies that around 10,000 children aged six to 14 are virtually enslaved in brothels and a further 5,000 aged 10 to 18 are working independently in tourist resorts.

In January 1991, facts such as these led to the establishment of ECPAT, which aims to end this modern form of child slavery. It is committed to changing the law in tourist-origin countries to allow prosecution at home of sex offences committed against children by citizens while abroad. The organisation developed a clear set of strategies. These were:

1. To lobby politicians and persuade them to enact laws which will protect children.
2. To find mechanisms which will ensure that the laws are enforced.
3. To initiate educational programmes which will:
 - a) convince parents and community leaders in villages and urban slums that selling their children for prostitution is not good for them or their children.
 - b) inform children of their rights.
 - c) dissuade tourists from sexually abusing children when they are visiting another country.
4. To provide research and accurate documentation which will assist the media and other interested groups to deal with the issue with honesty and sensitivity.

A NUMBER OF COUNTRIES HAVE changed their laws to meet this new situation. Sri Lanka recently introduced a revision of its penal code, under which the age of consent has risen from 12 to 16 or 18 years, and by which penalties for child sex abuse have increased too. A number of foreign paedophiles are now on trial for child sex abuse in Thailand, Philippines and Sri Lanka. New laws in the Philippines and Taiwan have also been enacted. Many western countries have introduced an innovative law of extra territoriality. This means, in practice, that if one of their citizens sexually abuses a child in a foreign country or is party to that sexual abuse, and is not tried for that crime in the country of the offence, he/she can be tried for the same crime in his/her own country. Germany intro-

duced this law in 1993; France, Australia and the the USA in 1994; Belgium and New Zealand in 1995.

Mr Pradhan, CWIN, Nepal, also stated that a number of tourists were changing their destinations from Thailand, Hong Kong and Philippines to Nepal for buying sex. He quoted a recent incident of eight tourists who were handed over to the police while they were abusing the Kathmandu street children.

There is evidence now that there is a growth of international networks of child sex abusers who work together to share information on the safest places to visit. The development of the huge market for child pornography is taking place in the world of computers.

Many tourism organisations are now accepting corporate responsibility for the growth of child prostitution. ECPAT has also commissioned a team of sociologists from the University of Leicester to visit the main centres of child sex abuse in the world. They spend their time in the hotels and beaches, talking to sex abusers and listening to their stories. From this they try to piece together a profile of the men who abuse children and why they do so.

Ludmilla Tuting of Nepal-Watch group voiced her concern that such workshops and conferences might result in putting India on the child sex tourism map. She requested the media to be sensitive to this issue and not contribute to the problem when they reported it. ■

So lucrative has the abuse of children become, that there are now many routes by which children are being trafficked from one country to another by criminal networks. In some cases several thousand children are being smuggled from one country to another every year. The two centres of major movement in Asia are from Burma, China and the former Indo-China area into Thailand, and from there to Japan and other Asian and European countries. And the second area is from Nepal and Bangladesh into India. About 7,000 Nepali girls enter India every year.

Child prostitution in its traditional form

her earnings, and also receive gifts from caste Hindus who worship her on those days that are dedicated to the devadasi's goddess.

Surveys have claimed that 50 per cent of all the prosti-

tutes in Maharashtra state began as devadasis. Girls from the *devadasi* system have been estimated to account for 20 per cent of the total girls in child prostitution. A network of traffickers operating between the sites of intense devadasi activity and neighbouring urban areas work easily with families interested to move the girls into the cities.

The influence of religion in promoting child prostitution needs to be addressed. It is clear that religion has very little to do with it in its present manifestation.

FROM THE ANCIENT TEMPLES OF DELPHI to the modern Hindu temples of India, the regular sexual abuse of young girls as temple prostitutes has been a way of obtaining religious merit. The term commonly used for these prostitutes is *Jogini* or *Devadasi*. Historically, the devadasis served a god to which they were ritually 'married', by dancing and singing in that god's temple. The *devadasi* tradition today, despite the 5,000 dedications a year that take place in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka, is almost completely lacking in either religious meaning or ritual. These dedication ceremonies give religious sanction to a family's decision to prostitute a daughter — who is initiated into this profession at puberty.

"Devadasis are caught in the same two-pronged mechanism of oppression, squeezing first their families and then the daughters within those families," writes Helen Chernikoff, UNICEF. 95 per cent of the girls who become devadasis are born into impoverished scheduled caste families who might depend on the income generated by prostitution. A family with no sons might force a daughter to become a devadasi to request a son, or to prevent her from marrying and draining family resources with her need for dowry.

It cannot be denied that more than religious devotion, it is the economic considerations that are paramount in most families' decision to push a daughter into prostitution via the devadasi dedication ceremony. The initiation ceremony is celebrated with a feast which is paid for by an upper caste man who has purchased the right to her virginity. The economic benefits for the family are immediate. They receive a lump sum from the girl's 'first master', often take at least some of

There are some castes that have traditionally accepted prostitution as their profession. The *Rajnat* tribe in Rajasthan is economically organised around a system of child prostitution. This tribe is only one of many such in Rajasthan. The system of prostitution practiced by this tribe is inherently child prostitution, as the girls enter prostitution by puberty. This tribe, earlier patronized by the Rajput monarchs, has now settled itself on the highways and practises prostitution there. The eldest daughter is raised, being fully aware that the tribe's survival depends on her labour as a prostitute. The tribe's economic and social organisation ensures that these girls do not question their fate. When a Rajnat girl reaches puberty, she undergoes an auction-like ceremony in which the highest bidder purchases the right to her virginity.

"Dehrehar is a community that has attached great importance to the art of singing and dancing," writes Dr Mukhopadhyay. Girls from this community are introduced to these arts from an early age, followed by their actual entry into the flesh trade. Girls from the Gandharva community enter into prostitution following a single decision by the community, and a high caste Hindu is then selected to have physical relations with her. She is expelled from the community if she refuses to accept the decision. The *Bedias* and *Kanjuars* are some of the other communities that have traditionally accepted prostitution as a source of livelihood.

Dr Mukhopadhyay suggests that these communities be treated as vulnerable groups, and specific developmental programmes be introduced for them. A change of attitude is needed. It would be a slow and challenging task but the only effective one. ■

Sexually exploited children: Some individual stories

- Young girls are beaten, raped and starved, and thus pressurised into receiving customers. A 14-year-old girl in a Bombay brothel resisted all pressure for three weeks. Consequently, she was put in a small room with a live cobra. She sat there numb, unable to move or sleep for two days, and eventually gave in to her captors.
- Rohan first sold sex at the age of 15 when he met an Englishman on a beach in Sri Lanka. The man asked Rohan to come to his room and he was paid US\$3. Since then Rohan has been with more men than he can remember. He uses condoms only if he is asked to. His friend, Sampath, is 12 but looks barely seven. Sampath's father is crippled and his mother chronically ill. He left primary school to feed his younger brother and parents. He was earning less than US\$0.50 as a builder's labourer. Rohan introduced Sampath to a foreigner who was willing to pay Sampath US\$2.75 if he went with him to a cheap guest house. Rohan received US\$4 for the introduction.
- Twelve-year-old Rosario was brought to Olongapo City General Hospital in the Philippines, in extreme pain. The doctors found in her uterus parts of a broken sex toy, several inches long, and with a rusty screw at one end. They estimated that the object may have been inside Rosario's uterus for as long as five months. Despite the removal of the object, she did not survive. An Austrian tourist, Heinrich Ritter, was convicted, but later released on appeal to be deported.

Return to normalcy: A long journey for the children

CHILDREN INVOLVED IN THE SEX industry usually experience guilt and low self esteem. Abused children in Thailand are quoted as saying, "I am no good", "god cannot forgive me", or "we are the scum of society". (*ECPAT report on child sexual exploitation*)

The issue of rehabilitation of children in difficult circumstances came up several times during the discussions. Mr O'Grady seemed to think that the expertise to deal with the problems of such children could not be found easily. In most Asian countries, he said, you could not even talk about the issue of child prostitution. "A lot of work has been done in the West in the area of sexual abuse of children within the family. We are trying to draw from that expertise in our work. Obviously it is an important area, care for such children should go on even after they are released from that environment of exploitation." He said that he welcomed partnerships with NGOs equipped with these skills.

These children have had such traumatic experiences at an early stage in their lives that they suffered from deep emotional scars. Quite often, normalcy is not restored by merely sending them back to their families.

A point was made that in a lot of cases the children of prostitutes were initiated into prostitution by their own mothers. The attitude of the prostitute mothers was to send their boys to school, but induct their girls into the profession as early as possible. This observation was refuted by several participants, including Dr Mukhopadhyay, Lalita from the Joint Women's Program (JWP), and Farida Lambay from the Nirmala Niketan School of Social Work.

Ms Lambay observed that in the Bombay brothels that she had studied, the above observation was not true. Mr Mukherjee argued that often the prostitute mothers were helpless as they were themselves in the clutches of the pimps and brothel

keepers. In such a situation, girls found it difficult to escape having grown up in that violent and exploitative atmosphere and knowing little else. The mothers that he interviewed, had always expressed the desire to educate their children and keep them out of the business.

In her presentation, Lalita remarked that when she started her work among the prostitutes in Delhi's G.B. Road, their main concern was for their children. "Do something for our children," they said to her. Finding space for a centre and resources to run the centre was the biggest problem. In 1990, JWP started a day care centre for the children of the prostitutes, where they could be educated. After five years of formal education, the children were admitted to government or boarding schools. Daughters of prostitutes had to be considered as highly vulnerable to becoming prostitutes. She said that when the mothers came to pick-up their children in the evening from the centres, people in the neighbourhood objected. When the children were sent to the boarding schools, their parental background was often not revealed as that led to further stigmatisation.

D.K. Manvalan of the Ministry of Welfare, talked about the government funding for programmes for the children of prostitutes in the metropolitan cities. He remarked that there were not many NGOs working in this area. "Voluntary action is called for," he said, "especially in psychological rehabilitation of children in such exploitative situations. The government could fund any special training required for the NGOs."

Returning the children to the parents is a debatable issue, as activists argue that the parents have gone through no counselling and rehabilitation programmes, and there were chances the children would end up in some other form of exploitative situation. NGOs need to come forward in setting up more rehabilitation centres for such children.

Dr Mukhopadhyay said that working on the rehabilitation aspect was the softer and the easier option for NGOs. To be based in the villages which were the source areas could be quite dangerous as the NGOs would have to confront the trafficking networks, which is the harder option. He also said that rehabilitation programmes should be formulated only for those wanting to come out of the profession. They should aim at both social and economic rehabilitation of the prostitutes and also at providing them a life free of stigma and isolation.

He added that nothing much could be achieved with regard to rehabilitation of the child prostitutes or the children of prostitutes unless society's attitude towards this group of children changed and became more sympathetic and liberal.

Many projects in countries with the problem of child prostitution focus on children from communities at risk who

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have not yet entered the sex trade. The Daughters' Education Project in Northern Thailand provides sponsorship and self-esteem workshops to help girls from poor families to stay in school. The Centre for Protection of Children's Rights, in Thailand, disseminates information to the villagers about the risks of physical and psychological damage, and HIV and AIDS, that the children face in the sex trade. The centre provides a home for up to 15 girls freed from brothels. Another centre, d' Estudios y Rehabilitacion Psico-social in Chile, contacted 360 children over six years. With the help of skilled staff including teachers, a psychologist and a social worker, 280 girls were able to avoid a return to prostitution.

"The wisdom of trying to end the prostitution of children rather than attempting to assist the victims has been confirmed. We have seen no evidence that children who have been systematically prostituted for more than a short period of time can ever be successfully rehabilitated. When a child is being forced to receive several sexual partners seven nights a week, the traumatic effect appears to be impossible to overcome. The experience of social workers in Asia is that extremely few children rescued from brothels have been able to begin living anything like a full and healthy life again," said Mr O'Grady.

Mr O'Grady also expressed his anxiety about telling people "to go do something for the children", as this required careful handling. He related the example of a sincere and sensitive European woman who took it upon herself to rescue a Nepali girl from a Bombay brothel. She arranged her escape but could not secure enough documents to get her out of the country to send her back home. Finally fed up with the situation, the girl returned to the brothel, as she had no community support to begin her life again. The following day she was killed, and her body parts were thrown on the streets to serve as a gruesome reminder for all those girls who might attempt to escape.

When brothels are raided and minors forced into prostitution rescued, the authorities often send them to government-run juvenile homes. It has been seen that these homes are also exploitative in nature. These children need a sensitive environment and effective emotional counselling.

What the law can but does not achieve

"Much of the prostitution of children in some countries could not take place without the connivance of the police."

Mr O'Grady, ECPAT

"There is no separate law in India against sexual exploitation of children."

Naina Kapur, Lawyer and Activist

"The police force's willingness to accept bribes at border crossings and in urban areas enables those in the business of child prostitution to operate without fear of punishment."

Ms H. Chernikoff, UNICEF

These were some of the concerns voiced at the consultation about the role of law and its enforcement in curbing child prostitution.

UNDER THE LAW, SEXUAL INTER-course with a child is rape, and the police prosecutes such cases regularly. The number of prosecutions that have taken place are:

216 (1992), 235 (1993), 245 (1994), 193 (till Sept 1995).

Deputy Commissioner of Police, Delhi, Maxwell Pereira, in his presentation, however, demanded that more teeth be given to the police in dealing with inter-state gangs trafficking children for prostitution.

He talked about the regular raids the police department has conducted at one of Delhi's red-light districts and said he had found that most of the girls adopted this profession out

of sheer poverty. He continued that the police did not always find children or minors in this trade. When the police conducts a raid, they rescue the young girls and send them to Nari Niketans (remand homes run by the government). As far as he was informed, none of those rescued in Delhi had returned to the same profession.

"The police continuously keeps the pressure on the red-light areas by maintaining vigil". Though child prostitution, he admitted, was prevalent, he did not believe that it had expanded or reached alarming proportions in Delhi.

Lalitha charged that the police officials often used the Prevention of Immoral Traffic Act (PITA), and the Juvenile Justice Act (JJA), to harass the prostitutes and their children. They often brand their children as neglected children and pick them up. The women are arrested and tested for HIV. The young girls are put in vigilance homes or remand homes. "How safe are these homes run by the government?" she asked. Research has shown that children in these observation homes often express a feeling of emptiness and nihilism, and that the police officials were also insensitive while asking the parental address of the girls.

Mr Pereira admitted that there were some problems, but also that there were differences in the role expectations on one hand, and the legally assigned roles of the police on the other.

Gerry Pinto of UNICEF, felt that in most of the cases it were the children who were penalised and not the adults. "Can we mobilise opinion to make the laws more child-friendly and ensure they are implemented in the right spirit?" he asked.

According to Naina Kapur, there is everything wrong with the legislation regarding prostitution and rape. "Prostitution is not the issue, it is the people who use the women and children. That is what is wrong. The definition of sexual assault in our laws is very narrow. Not enough is being done to arrest the clients, who are the exploiters," she stressed.

Mr Manvalan responded to her by saying that unless and until intervention went to the Supreme Court level, the government does not take the pains to change the content of the law.

In his book, *Rape of the Innocent*, Mr O'Grady, drawing from his experience in Thailand, writes: "In many Asian countries, the police are paid shockingly low wages. In such a situation, those who control the sex industry know that they will always be able to find police who can be bribed into closing their eyes to the abuse of children and to those who are the abusers. In Metro Manila alone, the National Police Commission has listed 93 cases of policemen providing protection to sex centres."

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In Ranong, which is a border town between Burma and Thailand, there is a large number of brothels serving the Burmese workers. Many Thai policemen receive money from the traffickers, said Mr O'Grady, and they openly said that if they stopped the flesh trade in Ranong, many Burmese workers would go into Thai cities. He also quoted an instance when the NGOs had to pay to hire a van which the police could use to raid a brothel, because the police was poorly equipped.

It was widely agreed at the consultation that there was a need for gender sensitisation programmes for the police.

Dr Singh alleged that all the training was being given to the high level officials and not the constables who gave protection, and were, at several places, running this profession. Both JWP and SAKSHI have been involved in training programmes in Delhi for police constables towards a better and more sensitive understanding of the problem of sexual and family violence and women's rights.

Dr Mukhopadhyay recommended that the law-enforcing mechanism should consider the phenomenon of child prostitution as a socio-legal and human problem. They should be strict, on one hand, with the persons involved in the procurement of girls and, on the other, be considerate and sensitive to the girls who become victims of circumstances.

Towards the end of his presentation, Mr Pereira expressed

some of the problems that the police faced: "The impact of police action is often negated as most accused are released on bail, and change their name and address and indulge in the trade again. It is not unusual that they jump bail, or the lawyers secure long term postponement on flimsy grounds. The courts ask for independent witness to give credibility to the police version. And the police cannot disclose the identity of the informer. How much social backing is there for police action against prostitution?"

It is critical that laws should not be used against the victims but against the exploiters. On one hand child traffickers force the children to offer their bodies and, on the other, the police lock them up in exploitative institutions in the name of rehabilitation. These homes are not a positive affirmation of the child's growth; rather, the way the child is often treated here — as if it did something wrong — is only a reaffirmation of the wrong-doing. The police only attack the symptom of the problem and not the causes.

Agenda for the NGOs

THE CONVENTION ON RIGHTS OF THE Child has been ratified by 178 countries including India. It gives the NGOs, lawyers, government officials, and police officers, no choice except to take all possible steps in ensuring protection of the rights of children. We do not need more legislations. We already have a number of laws which are not being implemented.

The NGO 'role' has almost become a pattern of speech. The chosen rhetoric is that the NGOs are the closest to the target groups, that the NGO role is the critical one. It is a way of transferring responsibility from one sector to another. The government and we, however, cannot escape the responsibility. NGOs can be partners, not substitutes, in the government's efforts. There is a need to raise public sensitivity to these problems that confront us in our work.

The time has come to rethink on the definition of NGOs. It has to include sections of media, law, women's groups, and academicians. We have to make the network more broadbased. We need to form new alliances. There are a number of young lawyers who are committed and sensitive to this problem. Why child prostitution has not figured in the mandates of women's groups is a question worth asking.

NGOs usually have a lot of problems in dealing with the police. Recently some street children were picked up by the police and harassed. The street educator happened to be present there and he protested to the police officials against the behaviour of the police. The police arrested him and beat him up badly for interfering while the police was performing its duty—in this case beating the children. There are, however, some very good individuals in the police force, and we need to build a positive relationship with them and use them as a catalyst for change in the system.

The problem of child prostitution has to be addressed not merely through rehabilitation, but with greater emphasis on

prevention. There are backward villages and districts that are the source areas for the traffickers. That is where the real problem is. The brothels in the cities are a symptom of that problem. NGOs working towards rural development should target such poor families that are forced to send their children to earn. The poverty alleviation and development programmes should target such families that are at risk.

NGOs and the police should work in partnership, and not watch helplessly as a child is being bailed out by pimps and taken back to the same environment.

In the discussion that followed, Mr O'Grady emphasised on the non-legal ways of dealing with the offenders. "We are not the police," he said, adding: "We do not have the skills to search the underworld mafia. It is dangerous. There are people who are making a lot of money in trafficking. NGOs need to approach it with caution. If the police won't act, put pressure on the offender by mobilising public support, media support, lawyers' help, and sympathetic politicians. We have seen the power of community action in Manila where the parents of the children went on a march and demanded justice; and in Goa where protests are going on; on the beach areas of Sri Lanka, where small community groups are committed to monitor the problem in order to protect their own children. The community has to rise up, and it is not something that is going to be easy. Like the drug trade, there is a lot of crime and a lot of money in this too. NGOs have to be very, very careful."

Dr Singh pointed out that in a village in south India, a 12-year-old girl was sent to Bombay to work as a labourer because her parents could not feed her. They did not know anything about Bombay or the nature of job she would be doing there. A man who had lent some money to the family would take her to Bombay. It is villages like these that are sending their children away that needed to be identified, he said. NGOs should get the village panchayats which now have women heads, to put this issue on their agenda, to monitor these vulnerable families and help intensify community action in these areas.

Mr Pinto warned against looking at problems in isolation. When the fight to withdraw working children from the garment industry in Bangladesh was on, it was said that a number of children displaced from child labour went to the street trades and some into prostitution. We have to look at the totality of the problem and not just one specific issue, and need to pursue approaches which are holistic, he added. This however should not take us away from our commitment to eliminate child labour—including child prostitution.

JWP, an NGO that took up the task of obtaining identity cards for the prostitutes of Delhi, found that it had to face problems from the government officials who thought a number of them were not citizens of India. "With these cards,

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we can prevent child prostitution or new entries, and give them basic rights to a ration card and access to health," said Lalitha. She also mentioned that the first phase of their day-care centre project funded by the Social Welfare Department, had been discontinued since. The officials at the Delhi Administration asked for a bribe to send a report to the department. She lamented about the amount of time they had to spend in building rapport with local police officials and sensitising them, only to find that they were transferred within months.

It was also pointed out that if social action groups worked in the source areas, and worked towards making education a must for children – especially for girls – they would not be sent to work at all. Primary education for every child should be made compulsory. Dr Mukhopadhyay warned the NGOs that in their efforts to rehabilitate these children, care should

be taken that they did not suffer any social stigma in the process.

There was some concern about lack of coordination between the NGOs, and it was felt that the problem of child prostitution could be effectively dealt with only if these agencies worked in cooperation with each other rather than in isolation. ■

We should put together a network of organisations and individuals that would continue to reflect and act on this problem. There is a need to have a regular dialogue with the government, to sensitise the media in promoting the struggle against child prostitution, to mobilise social support.

(Based on the presentation by Mr Pinto, UNICEF)

Forging a new alliance with the media

THE ARTICLES ON CHILD PROSTITUTION IN India that have begun to appear with increasing regularity in the popular press are doing much to break the silence that has long shrouded such an understandably sensitive subject. (*Ms H. Chernikoff, UNICEF*)

The media, like a player on the screen, an actor in the theatre, takes on many roles in the world. Its functions are to inform, to educate and to entertain, in that order. But in reality, we see that it first entertains and then worries about education and information. It titillates, is extremely voyeuristic in its attitude and projects sexuality in an irresponsible and immature way. A certain kind of arousal is taking place in and through the media today, which enforces inequity between man and woman, young and old, rich and poor. There is a message that sexual gratification can be bought – it is not something that can be negotiated. It tells you that if sex cannot be negotiated between two consenting adults, then it can be bought in a boundaryless and normless world. Sex that is subversive and perverse is allowed and created. In this sense the media is complicit to what is going on.

What makes news? When can the issue of child prostitution in print and audio visual media be called news? The answers are that it can be so only when it is related to news; only when a child is killed, or a racket is busted; only when it is an event. However, the issue of child prostitution is very often not an event. The media covers this issue whenever there is an occasion like a conference or gathering, or it is looked at with an 'Oh these poor children, don't they have any rights?' There is no advertent intention to start a dialogue, raise public awareness and analyse problems. Media decides what is important to be splashed on page one, page two and so on. If child issue is not important enough, the media does not cover it. It becomes a non-issue. Media does not play its role as promoter of issues in society.

There exists a vocabulary of acceptance, which needs to be

questioned. "Prostitution is the oldest profession in the world," and "it is a necessary evil." These are the words that are often used. Media has proved itself to be very uncreative about its role in rethinking these issues.

Prostitution is a sensitive issue. There is a demand for which there is a supply. The demand is essentially from a male clientele. Media is dominated by men. The non-coverage of these issues has to do with the fact that men do not like to open the newspaper, switch on the radio or television in the morning, and be reminded that they have failed as public citizens. It is important to call a spade, a spade. There is a conspiracy of silence over social issues, and this contributes to perpetuation of this 'oldest profession'.

Media should be approachable to an NGO, an individual or an academic institution. This can be done by conducting studies, documenting abuses, and collating and presenting all this information in a factual and unemotional manner. The NGOs should not forget that they are just one group among many clamouring for space in the media. There should be a concerted strategy to get NGOs' findings and statistics into the media by writing columns, suggesting chat show ideas on radio and television, etc.

The media is very much a part of what enables problems like child prostitution to continue. We have to convert it and make it a partner. (*Based on the presentation by Anita Anand, Women's Feature Service*).

In response to a question by Dr Singh about Doordarshan's unwillingness to do programmes on issues like child prostitution, Ms Anand said that Doordarshan often did not want the police, the government and the bureaucracy to be presented in a poor light. But that was also changing. They are opening up now. The tragedy is that such things are going on in our society.

Mr Pinto suggested that the media should not merely stop at reporting the raids by police. They should effectively follow up and find out what happens to the released children. The police mandate is to release them, but who takes on the responsibility of these children from there?

Lalita, JWP, made the point that even when the media covered such issues, they were insensitive to the victims. During a recent rescue mission of the police, the media took the pictures of all the girls and published them. That made it very difficult for these girls to go back to their homes in villages, as they did not want their families and villagers to know about their past profession. They feared they would not be accepted back. Ms Anand agreed that the media should stop its sensational, voyeuristic and blaming-the-victim approach in its coverage.

Working group to eliminate child prostitution in India

4. Representative of state and city networks.
5. Representative of schools of social work (other than Nirmala Niketan, College of Social Work).

OPERATION OF THE WORKING GROUP

1. The Secretariat will be the Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work, Bombay (Nirmala Niketan had organised the National Consultation supported by the Government of India and UNICEF, India).
2. The Convenor will be on rotation, holding office for one year.
3. The Working Group will meet initially once every quarter.
4. Funds will be sought from relevant agencies/the government to support activities of the Working Group.

AN THE END OF THE TWO-DAY CONSULTATION, a proposal was made to form a Working Group which would work towards the elimination of child prostitution in India. The Working Group would be a representative and participatory mechanism to address the goal of elimination of child prostitution.

THE MANDATE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKING GROUP

1. To build up alliances with the government, legal activists, women's groups, NGOs, police, media, tourism industry, funding agencies and other social and child development efforts.
2. To promote and facilitate documentation of ongoing efforts and programme strategies for prevention and rehabilitation of child prostitutes.
3. To facilitate and assist in collating a database on child prostitution to support policy development on the subject.
4. To facilitate networking at the national, state and city levels.
5. To liaise with international agencies like UNICEF and ECPAT.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE WORKING GROUP

1. Representative of the Government [Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD)].
2. Representative of ECPAT.
3. Representative of UNICEF.

In the discussion that followed, some changes were suggested and included. Almost everybody objected to the phrase *Child Prostitution* being used. Prostitution implies some degree of consensual action by the prostitutes. With children this does not occur. They give no consent. They are forced into this slavery. The Stockholm Congress is also going to look into this change of terminology. *Sexual Exploitation of Children for Commercial Purposes* was suggested, but everyone agreed that it was too long and cumbersome. The media continues to use the term *Child Prostitution*. In some parts of the world they have begun using the term *Prostituted Children*. Coining a new Indian phrase was also recommended.

Suggestions were made to extend the alliances: to inter-ministerial core groups, youth action groups, and women's units at trade unions. A newsletter was suggested for dissemination of campaign information. Working towards a review of existing laws should also be a priority.

Mr Pinto pointed out that we should resist the temptation to make it too big a working group. We should begin small and details would emerge as work progresses. Let us not dictate a pattern at the beginning, but keep it at a workable level now, he added.

There was a brief discussion about the need for a national working group. The dissenting voices were concerned that when something started as a national group, the grassroots NGOs felt estranged, there was a lot of talk and little and almost no linkages. But there is always a question of who will run the regional groups. There should be a loose group at the national level that will then build up a network of grassroots level groups which will initiate regional developmental activities.

Working group to eliminate child prostitution in India

It was decided that the first working group meeting would be convened by representatives from UNICEF, YMCA and ECPAT which will arrive at the exact composition and the source of funds. The UNICEF office in Nepal and Bangladesh could be used to promote and coordinate the activities of the local NGOs there.

In his concluding address, Mr O'Grady observed that this was a significant conference because Indian groups came together to take a serious look at this issue. For a long time

Indians did not acknowledge the existence of child prostitution, but things are changing. There are people in India now who are determined to take action against this evil.

Roy Trivedi of *Save The Children's Fund*, admitted in his valedictory address that we all knew that child prostitution in India existed for a long time, but it did not get enough attention at the national level. We have to try and enable a child to have a voice in this debate, he said. ■

Children's rights according to the convention

THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE Child (CRC) was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20, 1989. It sought to protect children everywhere against exploitation, neglect and abuse. Many of its provisions are reflected in the 'year 2000 goals' for improving the well-being of children, agreed on at the 1990 World Summit for Children.

Human rights conventions usually take several decades to achieve widespread international acceptance. In only five years, the CRC has been ratified by 175 nations. The governments of six more countries have signed the document, indicating their intention to bring change. Only 11 nations have not responded yet. Several of those, however, are expected

to do so before the end of 1995.

The convention draws attention to four sets of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights of every child. These are:

THE RIGHT TO SURVIVAL

- which includes the right to life, the highest attainable standard of health, nutrition and adequate standards of living. It also includes the right to a name and a nationality.

THE RIGHT TO PROTECTION

- which includes freedom from all forms of exploitation, abuse, inhuman or degrading treatment and neglect, including the right to special protection in situations of emergency and armed conflicts.

THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

- which includes the right to education, support for early childhood development and care, social security and the right to leisure, recreation and cultural activities.

THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION

- which includes respect for the views of the child, freedom of expression, access to appropriate information, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion. ■

Conclusion

prostitution, especially in terms of prevention of child abuse and the children's rehabilitation.

Some issues that emerged at the consultation happened to be the ones which had also been discussed in a previous National Consultation organised by Nirmala Niketan, Bombay, with support from the DWCD, Government of India, and UNICEF in December 1994. The meeting was a reiteration of the urgency that is required to address the problem of child prostitution in India. The consensus was that this problem could no longer be shied away from or dismissed as insignificant. The responsibility of tackling this problem lay both with the government, the NGOs, legal activists, police and all those citizens who were concerned with the rights of the child. For a substantive impact both on advocacy and programme interventions, it is necessary that integration be established between various agencies – grassroots NGOs, and state/city level NGO networks – to ensure a substantial impact on the problems of children in prostitution.

THE NATIONAL CONSULTATION PROVIDED a good forum for socially sensitive academicians, professionals, NGOs and activists from different parts of India to express their concern at the extreme form of child abuse, particularly of girls employed in child prostitution. There were also participants from Nepal, Germany, the UK and Thailand (ECPAT) who were concerned with the issue of child prostitution. While the discussions were on the prevailing problem of child prostitution – frequently referred to as a growing problem – various factors that have contributed to children being drawn into this profession, and the several problems that are being faced by victimised children, also came to light.

The meeting was enriched by several NGOs and activists who are currently involved in addressing the problem of child

Child prostitution has to be presented to society as a priority concern of the entire society, and should not be seen merely as a target of welfare programmes. Different ministries, agencies and NGOs need to have a coordinated approach and a partnership if the problem is to be effectively addressed. Social awareness would necessarily be an intrinsic part of any solution that is attempted to address child prostitution. While rehabilitation might be important to withdraw children who are already caught in such sexual abuse, more critical would be a well-thought policy and programme, and approaches that could clearly focus on absolute prevention of child prostitution. ■

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NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON CHILD PROSTITUTION

Held by

YMCA, NEW DELHI, AND ECPAT INTERNATIONAL

IN ASSOCIATION WITH UNICEF INDIA

From

November 18 to 20, 1995

PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

November 18 (Saturday), 1995

Play by street children on child prostitution

Inaugural speech by Jon Rohde, MD, Representative of UNICEF in India

November 19 (Sunday), 1995

Presentation by Ron O'Grady, International Coordinator, ECPAT

Presentation by Prof K.K. Mukhopadhyay, Delhi School of Social Work, University of Delhi

Presentation by Gerry Pinto, UNICEF, India

Presentation by Gauri Pradhan, CWIN, Nepal

Presentation by Dr Gracy Fernandes, Nirmala Niketan School of Social Work, Mumbai

Presentation by Jayanta Chowdhury, ECPAT, India

Presentation by Lalitha, Joint Women's Programme, India

Presentation by Madan Modi, Child Relief and You (CRY), India

Government Programmes – D.K. Manvalan, Additional Secretary, Department of Social Welfare

November 20 (Monday), 1995

Role of Media – Anita Anand, Women's Feature Service

Need for Child-sensitive Legislation – Naina Kapur, Lawyer

Law Enforcement – Maxwell Pereira, DCP (Crime), Delhi Police

Government Programmes – D. K. Manvalan, Additional Secretary, Department of Social Welfare

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