Alert on 2010 Child Trafficking

The five-week school break during the 2010 FIFA World Cup could lead to hundreds of children being recruited into child prostitution rings and thousands more being trafficked, a child rights professor has warned.

The warning comes less than 18 months before the World Cup Kick-off, with no measure yet in place to protect children from abuse, exploitation and trafficking during the 30-day event.

Although elaborate in other aspects, South Africa's current 2010 World Cup safety plan does not make provision for the rights and safety of children ahead of, or during the tournament.

Susan Kreston, Fulbright professor and research fellow in Centre for Psychology and Law at the University of the Free State said, she was opposed to the Education Department's cont. no p7

Zambia Passes Legislation

IOM has welcomed the passing of Zambia's first law that comprehensively addresses human trafficking in the country. President Rupiah Banda signed The Anti-Human Trafficking Act (No. 11 of 2008) which enables the prosecution of human traffickers and commits the government to providing protection services to victims of the crime.

The new law gives greater authority and prosecutorial ability to police officers, immigration officers, and customs officials. Customs officials are now able to search and arrest those suspected of transporting human trafficking victims. The government is also required to provide protection and compensation to victims of human trafficking.

Since 2006, IOM has been working closely with the Zambian government on anti-trafficking legislation, and providing assistance to the Zambia Law Development Commission (ZLDC), which helped author the Bill.

Elizabeth Barnhart, IOM's counter-trafficking officer in Zambia said the sale and exploitation of victims often take place outside of the country, in places such as South Africa, Europe and North America, and this new law will help law enforcement to prosecute those who are recruiting and handling the victims.

IOM has been training law enforcement officers at Zambia's borders to identify potential victims of trafficking before they cross the border. IOM also provides shelter and services to victims of trafficking, and raises community awareness on safe migration and human trafficking.

The Southern African country is a source and transit country for victims of human trafficking. Victims are recruited from villages, as well as urban and peri-urban areas, and often taken South Africa's urban centres. Once there, they are forced into domestic servitude or sexual exploitation. Other African and Asian victims also transit through Zambia including nationals from East and Central Africa.
Dear reader,

Welcome to the first issue of the EYE on Human Trafficking of 2009.

The FIFA World Cup is the biggest sporting event in the world, and is expected to draw hundreds of thousands of visitors into South Africa in 2010. This upsurge in entries might present a number of migration challenges. Criminal elements tend to exploit the demand for services during such periods to engage in human trafficking for purposes such as sexual exploitation and forced labour. In addition, the particular socio-economic conditions in the region and continent may engender other unique challenges. For example, migrants who travel regularly or irregularly overland often become vulnerable to physical and sexual violence and to HIV infection among other concerns. Xenophobic sentiments, a problem experienced across the world, have to be addressed as we prepare for this event. Meanwhile, some migrants may be left stranded or face deportation because they failed to take appropriate measures to ensure that they travelled safely and with the right documentation. They need to be warned and assisted where necessary.

In 2006, IOM partnered with MTV and other stakeholders to launch a massive counter-trafficking campaign ahead of the FIFA World Cup in Germany. IOM has put in place a strategy to tackle not only human trafficking, but also these other migration challenges, bearing in mind the unique socio-economic landscape of the region.

As usual, we need the technical, strategic and financial support of partners, donors, corporate bodies and civil society to meet these objectives. For more information, please contact eye@iom.int.

Enjoy the read.

Hans-Petter Boe
Regional Representative
IOM Southern Africa

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**EDITORIAL**

**Trafficking in Persons - Not Just a Cross-Border Problem**

In October 2008, IOM and USAID released six-month study, entitled “No Experience Necessary: The Internal Trafficking of Persons in South Africa.” This qualitative study is the first survey research on the trafficking in children, women and men for labour and sexual exploitation within South Africa.

The study focused primarily on the public sector and civil society outreach workers, law enforcement and social workers, to determine their levels of awareness and first-hand information on trafficking, its nature, causes, routes and victims in South Africa. It concluded that victims of internal trafficking are most often from rural areas where unemployment and poverty increase vulnerability. Provinces such as the Eastern Cape, Mpu­malanga, and Limpopo were frequently noted as possible areas for recruitment. Also, Child-headed households resulting from HIV/AIDS are highly susceptible to trafficking. Other key findings were that women are as likely to be recruiters as men; and children are recruited for different types of forced labour, including street vending, domestic servitude and sexual exploitation through false promises of accommodation and income.

USAID’s mission director, Dr. Carleen­e­ne Deli, postulate that human trafficking occurs in South Africa, but the problem is inadequate information Africans to respond effectively to human trafficking offences and to assist victims.

According to researcher, Laura Bermudez, “many people don’t immediately understand the issue of internal trafficking because they have always understood trafficking to be of a cross-border nature. Once they relay their first hand experiences, however, the cases they speak of are clearly situations of trafficking in persons.” Bermudez found out that, internal trafficking covers the spectrum of purposes, including sexual exploitation and forced labour; the latter being an issue that little was known about prior to this study.

Bermudez highlights the crucial need to move beyond the concept that trafficking is only a cross-border issue. Instead, the vulnerabilities facing the country and its people from within must be considered and used to develop an integrated, proactive approach to the problem. Bermudez recommends incorporating development to create a concerted response by all stakeholders.

With USAID funding of $650,000 (about R6.5 million), IOM has trained more than 600 civil society and community representatives to identify and provide services to trafficking in persons victims. IOM runs a Human Trafficking toll-free helpline: 0800 555 99.
IOM Zimbabwe Launches National Toll-free Counter-Trafficking Hotline

The launch was attended by senior government officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, Public Service Labour and Social Welfare, Information and Publicity, and Economic Development. Also in attendance were representatives from Embassies, Donors, United Nations Agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and the media.

The National Toll free Counter-Trafficking Hotline number is: 0800-32 22222 and will have operators from 7:00 until 19:00, with a 24-hour answering service to provide information on human trafficking and assistance to victims of trafficking and their families. The public can also use the hotline to report cases or suspected cases of human trafficking, as well as to verify the legitimacy of jobs and study opportunities which they have been offered.

Information obtained from the hotline is expected to provide invaluable direction to the programming of coordinated interventions in addressing human trafficking in the country. The hotline operators are trained on human trafficking, telephone answering skills and therapeutic telephone counseling skills.

OASIS Zimbabwe, one of IOM's partners in running the hotline, is part of a global coalition called "Stop the Traffic", working together to fight human trafficking. IOM is also partnering with local authorities police victim friendly unit, Interpol, social workers, immigration and civil society organizations who can provide assistance as part of a referral system to assist victims of trafficking, conduct investigations and follow-up.

In her inaugural address, IOM Zimbabwe Deputy Chief of Mission, Dyane Epstein said the National Toll free Counter-Trafficking Hotline is a key activity of the Southern African Counter-Trafficking Assistance Programme (SACTAP) as it will assist people in getting information and assistance in relation to human trafficking. IOM, she continued, anticipates a greater ability to act on information received through the helpline, working closely with the law enforcement and social services providers, who may increase the number of referrals of trafficked persons to SACTAP's victim support structure.

Through networking with various stakeholders, IOM will provide the following services: information on human trafficking, psycho-social support to victims, legal advice, medical attention, shelter, food, other basic necessities, reintegration assistance, transport assistance, as well as assisting voluntary return.

Officially opening the hotline, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, Mr. L. C. Museka said that the occasion marked the beginning of a new era in efforts to extend vital assistance to victims and potential victims of trafficking.

"The toll free hotline will provide further impetus for the heightened government action to “stop the Traffic” by putting in place proactive measures to deal with clandestine migration, including Trafficking in Persons.”

He congratulated IOM and OASIS Zimbabwe for the establishment of the toll free hotline and highlighted the importance of collaboration between states and other relevant stakeholders to deal with the problem of Human Trafficking as it has the potential to compromise national security.

The representative of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Trafficking, Mr. J. M. Tapera said the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Trafficking was established in April 2006 and has come up with measures to help in combating human trafficking in Zimbabwe. Some of the measures recommended by the Committee include: criminalizing the offence of Trafficking in Persons in Zimbabwe through the enactment of appropriate legislation, information dissemination through country wide campaigns on the dangers of Trafficking in Persons and conducting nationwide research on human trafficking in order to understand the magnitude of the problem and how best to respond.

IOM is currently airing radio ads on four radios stations (Power FM, SFM, Radio Zimbabwe and National FM) in five different languages (English, Shona, Ndebele, Kalanga and Venda), to create awareness of the dangers of human trafficking and encourage people to use the helpline. Zimbabwe joins South Africa and Zambia as the only countries with counter-trafficking hotlines in the SADC region.

Established in Zimbabwe since 2005, IOM has been working to fight human trafficking through direct assistance to victims, capacity building of key stakeholders, research and data collection, and a nationwide information/awareness campaign.
Control Mechanisms in Human Trafficking

The question often arises why trafficked persons do not escape from their conditions of exploitation even when they appear to have freedom of movement, away from the constant guard of their traffickers. This question is central to the determination that a person is being in fact exploited, and can therefore be considered as a victim of trafficking. While many trafficked persons may appear to have freedom, there exist many control mechanisms which are used by traffickers so that visibly ‘free workers’ may often actually be under coercive conditions with dangerous or even mortal threats hanging over them. This article will examine the operation of some of these control mechanisms and their roles in controlling victims of human trafficking. These control mechanisms generally apply to both internal trafficking (within countries) and cross-border trafficking (between countries), although debt bondage and confiscation of documents are more commonly used in the latter case.

Debt Bondage

This method of control is used to impose a sense of indebtedness to the trafficker and to give victims false hopes that they can regain their freedom by repaying their ‘debt’ irrespective of what conditions they need to work under. Debt bondage occurs after a trafficker has paid for the travel of a victim to a foreign location where he/she has been promised a job. Once the victim gets to the location, the trafficker usually imposes a debt bond on him/her, under the pretext of recouping the costs of arranging travel documents and transportation. However, this debt bond is usually a sum that is exponentially higher than what the trafficker actually spent. Sometimes, the victim is made to sign a bogus contract in a foreign, incomprehensible language or with unclear and unfair terms that serve to enforce the debt bond. The victim is therefore required to ‘work off’ the debt they owe for the ‘services provided’, usually through forced prostitution. The trafficker may not only exaggerate the sum of money that was spent for the victim’s travel, but may also charge exorbitantly for accommodation and food, repeatedly fine the victim for breaking ‘rules’, or simply increase the debt without any justification. In some instances, when victim has paid off most or all off the debt, he/she may be sold to another trafficker who imposes a new debt, thus perpetuating the cycle of enslavement.

Social and Linguistic Isolation

The sometimes complex nature of a victim’s immigration status (undocumented or working without a legal work permit), lack of money or skills to survive independently, illiteracy, twisted perceptions of practices or culture in the destination country compound the fear and loneliness a victim usually experiences if he/she decides to run away from a trafficker. The victim’s fear is usually heightened if he/she does not speak the local language and this leads to linguistic isolation as he/she can not communicate with anyone and therefore have trouble seeking assistance. The victim may be locked up in a room, brothel, sweatshop, or another location where exploitation often takes place, with no idea where he/she is. He/she is usually isolated from the public including contact with outsiders, and the trafficker makes sure that every contact is monitored. This social isolation compounds the situation further in that contact with the outside world is limited and the victim has to rely on information provided by the trafficker which is false in most instances. In cases where the victim is a prostitute, the trafficker may threaten to expose him/her and for the fear of isolation and humiliation, the victim becomes loyal and obedient.

Stockholm Syndrome

After a long period of servitude to the trafficker, some victims become emotionally attached to the trafficker and chose to remain with him/her, even if it means working under exploitative conditions. Furthermore, because of the fear of being deported, a victim may develop loyalty towards his/her trafficker or even try to protect him/her from the police.

Violence and Threats of Violence

The trafficker often employs threats to coerce the victim, making him/her to believe that his/her loved ones are in danger if he/she refuses to carry out the demands of the trafficker. If the victim fails to comply with the demands of the trafficker, this could result in violent abuse or physical harm to his/her family member(s). In one instance investigated by the South African police, a trafficker abducted the new-born baby of his victim, and forced her to work as a prostitute in order to keep her abducted baby from being harmed. The victim is usually beaten, raped, drugged or tortured in order to subjugate him/her. These acts are often used to punish disobedience but also to send a warning to others who may be thinking of disobeying or attempting to escape.

Voodoo, witchcraft and similar practices

The practice of witchcraft, also known as voodoo, is sometimes used to intimidate victims of trafficking. Some traffickers collect hair or clothing from their victims and use these to perform magic rituals, giving the victims the impression that something terrible will happen to them or their family should they escape. Others take the victims to shrines of witch doctors and impostors who perform fetishes and make them swear oaths of obedience. Even if the validity of these practices are questionable, many victims believe that it could lead to severe consequences should they not comply.

Debt Bondage

The trafficker often unlawfully withholds the victim’s documents that such as, passport, return ticket and other immigration documents upon arrival at the country of destination where the exploitation is intended to take place. This puts the trafficker in a position of undue authority over the victim, to whom he/she can then dictate the type of work to be done, its duration and other expectations. The trafficker often gives the victim the impression that police and law enforcement officials will arrest and/or deport him/her should he/she try to approach them, for lack of documentation. Alternatively, the trafficker may tell the victim that it is unnecessary to seek police protection because they are corrupt and on friendly terms with the trafficker.

Confiscation of Documents

The trafficking of documents

Shame and Stigmatization

Many victims of human trafficking who are subjected to sexual slavery or forced prostitution resign to their situation because of fear of stigmatization should they return home. In many cases, victims of trafficking and prostitution blame themselves for having become involved and feel ashamed to have
Control Mechanisms in Human Trafficking

Psychological Abuse
The trafficker creates mental fear in the mind of the victim in order to strengthen his/her hold on him/her. This mental brainwashing makes the victim live in a state of terror and fear. At times the consequences of this could be depression and suicidal tendencies. In many cases, some victims especially women, blame themselves for their involvement in trafficking and prostitution. Many do experience significant levels of psychological trauma due to the level of abuse that they have endured. In some cases, this trauma leads to dissociation, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder which in turn affect them for behaving normally.

Although each of these mechanisms may be used in isolation, in the majority of cases, a combination of them are employed by the trafficker in order to create a condition of physical and/or psychological imprisonment of the victims. As the fight against human trafficking gathers momentum, there is an increasing need for stakeholders to understand these control mechanisms and others. Frequently, local law enforcement officials encounter victims of trafficking through raids of brothels or other crime prevention activities. While it might not be immediately apparent that trafficking has occurred because of the absence of physical signs of restraint, a sound understanding of these control mechanisms could help them in identifying and protecting victims.

by Maureen Lifongo, IOM Pretoria

Community stabilization can reduce human trafficking

Given in to the demands of their traffickers. When forced to return home, they are faced with the disappointment from their families and friends, having fallen short of everyone's expectations to start a new life. Families have been known to disown their children because they were forced to work as prostitutes overseas. Victims forced into sex slavery can be subdued with drugs and subjected to extreme violence. Others who are trafficked for sexual exploitation face physical and emotional damage from forced sexual activity, surgical treatment from forced or voluntary pregnancy terminations in unsanitary conditions, and exposure to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Poverty is therefore a major push factor in the human trafficking process. Addressing poverty and creating sustainable jobs and business for the “have-nots” is therefore a milestone in combating human trafficking. We cannot downplay the importance of law enforcement and other counter-trafficking measures; however, there seems to be so much focus on the recruitment stage and the consequences of human trafficking that relevant stakeholders seem to be paying too little attention to the critical aspect of prevention.

Poverty manifests in a number of ways so it is very difficult to fight it in a narrow and rigid manner. But the common factor of every poverty stricken person is the lack of money: money for clothes, money for school, money for food, etc. This lack often simultaneously creates traffickers and victims of human trafficking. What we collectively need to do is to create sustainable economic opportunities for the disadvantaged. This should be a critical focus of all organizations. Institutions, including government, should avoid giving temporary handouts, but focus on more permanent ways of eradicating poverty; ways that have the potential of benefiting the wider community.

IOM recognizes the need for creating sustainable projects which have the potential to assist disadvantaged groups on a long term basis. IOM is in the process of implementing income generating activities in poor communities in South Africa and other parts of the world, as a means of combating human trafficking and other ills to which such communities are rendered vulnerable. These projects seek to facilitate the employment or the creation of small businesses for disadvantaged populations. In this way, IOM strives to close the huge inequality gap experienced in poverty stricken countries.

In essence, IOM’s community projects target potential victims rather than saving victims. By increasing the quality of life of the people, it reduces that vital factor of poverty that pushes some people into the hands of traffickers and others into becoming traffickers. Creating a healthy and self sufficient society is key to addressing many of the society’s vulnerabilities and counter-trafficking stakeholders should factor this into their responses and programmes.

by Suliwe Sihlwayi, IOM Pretoria
Best Practices: Recruitment Firm against Human Trafficking

Recruitment is an essential element of human trafficking, and a number of recruitment companies have in the past come under the radar for intentional or unintentional complicity in human trafficking cases. Global recruitment company, Tropical Enterprises has made a commendable statement, memorandum and oath against human trafficking. This excerpt of their commitment underlines the role that companies in the human resources, tourism, transporation and other relevant sectors can play in the fight against human trafficking.

Tropical joins campaign to stop Human Trafficking

The management of Tropical Enterprises South Africa views Human Trafficking in a very serious light. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the practise of human trafficking in all its forms, whether explicit or disguised.

It is therefore that we have joined an international coalition and established an alliance with Humanitarian Eglade Seiber of Gulf Shores Al., USA and participating countries and agencies in efforts to combat Human Trafficking. Eglade Seiber has been active in promoting legislation, collaboration and the formation of an alliance between civilian organisations and companies to campaign against Human Trafficking.

Tropical South Africa endeavours to identify and report recruitment agencies, travel agencies, individuals and/or their agents and suppliers to the United States Government, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and working committees of the United Nations and international agencies who campaign against Human Trafficking -- who recruit persons for work in the USA and other countries without work contracts and permits, who collect monies from people under the pretence of employment, who send such persons abroad and leaving them stranded and/or without shelter, food, and/or no place to go. We view any of these practises as forms of Human Trafficking.

Tropical further endeavours to report all agencies or individuals who practise trafficking of persons in any form, to the international media and expose them for what they are doing.

Tropical Enterprises South Africa supports the formation of an international coalition and alliance against human trafficking.

Tropical further pledges its full support and cooperation to international law-enforcement authorities who are actively combatting Human Trafficking.

Tropical South Africa Memorandum and Oath on Human Trafficking

We, the directors, employees and representatives of Tropical Enterprises South Africa, a division of Lorrenmor (Pty) Ltd., South Africa, having read the below;

“Trafficking of persons is a global human rights problem. Victims are trafficked into a range of forced labour situations including farm work, sweatshops, domestic servitude, and sexual slavery. Victims of trafficking are subjected to sexual abuse and other forms of violence. Trafficking involves transporting people away from the communities they live in by the threat or use of violence, deception, or coercion for the purpose of exploitation as forced or enslaved workers. According to the US Department of State, each year an estimated 600,000-800,000 men, women, and children are trafficked across international borders. Human trafficking is a crime that requires international cooperation to stop.

Trafficking violates a range of human rights, including the rights to: physical and mental integrity; life; liberty; security of the person; dignity; freedom from slavery, slavery-like practices, torture and other inhuman and degrading treatment; family life; freedom of movement; privacy; the highest attainable standard of health; and safe and secure housing.

Recognizing the importance of trafficking, the United States passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and other important legislation to hold accountable the perpetrators of such crimes and protect the victims. The United States has gone further by ratifying the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, which are the first international instruments to define “trafficking in persons.” These treaties make clear that trafficking is a crime and guarantees trafficking victims certain protections and assistance, including protection of their privacy and physical safety, as well as provisions for their physical, psychological, and social recovery. Parties to the treaty should provide temporary or permanent residency to victims of trafficking in appropriate cases.”

Solemnly declared and took the oath;

That we have acquainted ourselves with International Treaties, Conventions and Laws prohibiting Human Trafficking;

And, that we support, uphold and conform to the International Treaty of The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings which was finalised on 16 May 2005 and which is a comprehensive treaty focussing on three main purposes:

1. To prevent and combat trafficking;
2. To protect the human rights of victims;
3. And to promote international cooperation on action against the crime;

This declaration was signed by all employees and directors of Tropical Enterprises South Africa on 19 September 2008 in Johannesburg South Africa.

" verbatim

The law requires the government to lay a solid foundation for prevention, prosecution and protection and we now have the legal framework to ensure that justice is realized."

Maxwell Mainsa of the Zambia Law Development Commission, welcoming Zambia’s new anti-trafficking legislation.
MAURITIUS/MOZAMBIQUE: Bringing Law Enforcement and Social Workers Together to Fight Human Trafficking

In November 2008, a series of IOM trainings were conducted in Mozambique and Mauritius for law enforcement officers, immigration officials and social workers. It was aimed at helping participants to fight human trafficking and to protect its victims, including children.

The training in Mozambique was a continuation of support to help disseminate information on the country’s adopted counter-trafficking law, drawn up with IOM’s assistance. Participants, selected from four provinces in southern Mozambique, also learned how to interpret and apply the law properly.

In Mauritius, the training, funded by the British High Commission, marked the first of this kind of cooperation between IOM and the Mauritan Police Force. Participants included representatives from each division and district of the police force, as well as government officials from the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Women’s Rights, Child Protection and Family Welfare, the State Law Office, and the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children.

In both countries, law enforcement and social workers were equipped with the necessary skills to identify irregular migration at an early stage, and in particular to detect and assist potential victims of trafficking.

It is expected that the training will also lead to the creation of new links for cooperation and referral mechanisms between different law enforcement agencies. These will be crucial to ensuring a coordinated and proactive response to human trafficking. To this effect, social workers were trained to work closely with law enforcement to fully meet the protection needs of victims.

The training is part of IOM’s Southern African Counter Trafficking Assistance Programme (SACTAP) that addresses human trafficking across the region. SACTAP, funded by the Norwegian government and the US State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), is the first programme in Southern Africa to offer a comprehensive and cohesive regional counter-trafficking response, engaging government institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector.

For more info, contact Nely Chimedza at IOM Maputo: nchimedza@iom.int; or Michael Newson at IOM Port Louis: mnewson@iom.int

Alert on 2010 Child Trafficking cont. from p 1

decision to close all schools during the World Cup. She said the government should have instead kept children at school from 8am to 3pm and shifted the school holidays to before or after the event in order to prevent sexual predators and traffickers from preying on vulnerable youngsters.

“These kids are obviously going to be roaming around the host cities and trying to get to the stadiums to see their “stars and to be part of the action”, and this will make them vulnerable and an emergency plan is needed to keep them aware of the dangers” said Kreston.

Kreston further said that children, especially girls from as young as seven and eight were being targeted by traffickers, facing a future of being sexually violated up to six times a day.

“Public awareness is crucial especially ahead of mega sporting events thus, legal and other measures must be put in place to ensure that citizens are safe” She reiterated.

Revealing the findings of research on the 'Impact of the 2010 World Cup on the Abuse, Exploitation and Trafficking of Children', Leizel Coetzee of the Southern Hemisphere Consultants said the five-week school holiday would definitely give rise to exploitation, abuse and trafficking of children if no plans were put in place to keep them occupied. There were concerns that there was still no provision in the National 2010 Safety Plan to protect children during the event, and that no solid alternative programme to keep them occupied had been announced.

“A comprehensive programme is urgently needed for that period to keep school children occupied because, the risk of traffickers and other sexual predators hitting is also very high as the government prepares to relax visa and border control during that period and there will be also an increase in the consumption of alcohol” she opined.

Coetzee also said the “danger zones” where teenagers and children were likely to be recruited included areas around the World Cup Stadiums in host cities as well as at fan parks and public viewing areas.

Coetzee added that South Africa could be used as a “transit country” for traffickers during the World Cup.

Molo Songololo Chief Executive, Patrick Solomon said the National Government and the 2010 Local Organizing Committee had noted the lack of child safety measures in their World Cup plans, and were in the process of addressing it. He said the five-week school closure had turned out to be a “big problem” and would be tackled as a priority. “We will lobby the Department of Education to reverse that decision, but if not, they would have to assist with a program to keep the children occupied during the event” Solomons said.

By Clayton Barnes for Cape Argus, 10 December 2008

In January, the government announced its decision to close all schools during the World Cup. She said the government should have instead kept children at school from 8am to 3pm and shifted the school holidays to before or after the event in order to prevent sexual predators and traffickers from preying on vulnerable youngsters.

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By Clayton Barnes for Cape Argus, 10 December 2008
PHILIPPINES: Concerns grow over human trafficking as financial crisis deepens

MANILA, 13 March 2009 (IRIN) - Concerns are growing that the global economic slump, which is causing increased joblessness, could see an increase in human trafficking, said specialists.

Law enforcers, labour leaders and social workers fear the unemployed may become increasingly desperate, making them vulnerable to human traffickers. Most of the Filipinos being laid off are women working in the export sector, so there is concern they will be at particular risk.

"Along with a possible upsurge of criminality as joblessness and poverty spread, there could be a rise in cases of human trafficking," says lawyer Ferdinand Lavin, chief of the National Bureau of Investigations (NBI) Anti-Human Trafficking Division. "People will be more aggressive in finding jobs and human traffickers will take advantage of the situation."

"It is a valid fear," says Julius Cainglet, spokesman for the Federation of Free and Exploitation since the sectors heavily dependent on foreign workers to upgrade their skills so they can find work again and not be victimised by human traffickers."

In 2007, the NBI dealt with 122 cases of human trafficking and in 2008, 130. Lavin says 90 percent of these were women who were victims of forced labour and exploitation.

There is no official government data on trafficking but Visayan Forum, a national NGO, says it had assisted 32,000 people since 2003, when the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act was made law.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), however, said it had assisted only 6,000 victims of trafficking since 2003. Many of them were minors forced in sex slavery both domestically and outside the country. The DSWD data did not include men.

Social worker Ruby Dumpit, head of the community-based service unit of the DSWD, said the majority of trafficking victims were women. "They would prefer to work abroad and in their desperation, are vulnerable to exploitation. Others look for [normal] jobs in urban areas but end up in brothels."

Dumpit says the growing joblessness also makes children vulnerable to trafficking as they are pressured to help boost the family income. Often, these minors find themselves being forced into pornography or prostitution, he says.

Denise, not her real name, was recently rescued by NBI operatives from a bar in Pasay City. Her parents were jobless and she was convinced by an unscrupulous job recruiter to leave her home province of Leyte ostensibly to work as a waitress in a restaurant in Metro Manila. She ended up working in the bar, younger than the 18 legal limit, and then was forced into prostitution. "I had to help my family since my parents have no work," she says. She is now undergoing counselling at a shelter for trafficked women.

Women most vulnerable

The National Economic Development Authority and the Labor Department say 42,000 people have lost their jobs in the Philippines since the financial meltdown began, mostly in export industries.

The Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research (EILER), a local NGO, says women are especially vulnerable to job loss and exploitation since the sectors heavily affected by the global slump principally employ women.

EILER executive director, Anna Leah Colina, said: "Women account for 80 percent of the workers in export processing zones." This does not include the contractual workers who have no security benefits.

The government has set aside P330 billion (US$6.8 billion) for a stimulus package. A third of the money will be spent on infrastructure projects. But Cainglet said the jobs to be created in infrastructure will mainly benefit male, not female, workers.

The Philippines enacted the anti-trafficking in law 2003 and authorities have so far secured only 12 convictions, representing only 2 percent of the total 573 cases filed by the Department of Justice.

Dumpit says the low conviction rate is not expected to deter trafficking perpetrators. "And more jobless people means more potential victims for them."