

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UH-Manoa Globalization Research Center Conference Ends with Plan for Hawai'i Human Trafficking Task Force

Alliance of government, law enforcement, social service, academic, and community leaders to be modeled on Washington State Task Force Against the Trafficking of Persons

HONOLULU - November 15, 2002 - The UH Manoa Globalization Research Center Human Trafficking Conference ended today with a call for the creation of a Hawai'i Task Force Against Human Trafficking modeled on a similar task force in Washington State.

"We have been reminded again and shocked again to learn about the extent of the human trafficking problem in the United States and the world and the suffering it causes," said Dr. Barry Gills, Director of the Globalization Research Center (GRC). The GRC (with support from the East-West Center) co-sponsored the high-level humanitarian conference titled, "The Human Rights Challenge of Globalization in Asia-Pacific-US: The Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children" at the Hawai'i Convention Center.

"We have also been impressed and inspired by the model of Washington State where -- with the leadership of state Representative Velma Veloria (11th District, Seattle) and the support of many others - the Legislature and governor created a task force to combat human trafficking, to support law enforcement and to help care for the victims of human trafficking."

"While research and discussion is important, we want to be a catalyst for actions that will make Hawai'i and the world a better place," Gills said. "We believe the enforcement of current law is essential and we want to consider whether new laws or changes to existing laws are needed to help combat human trafficking, which is the fastest growing criminal activity in Asia-Pacific, the United States and the world.

"We also want to find ways to protect and assist victims of human trafficking - usually women and children with few economic, social or legal resources. They are treated as slaves by individuals, families and a few companies," Gills said.

"In addition to hard labor in fields and factories, and degrading forced sex industry work, trafficking victims are often subjected to cruel mental and physical abuse in order to keep them in servitude, including beating, rape, starvation, forced drug use, confinement, and seclusion. This must stop."

State Representative Marilyn Lee (D-38th District, Mililani, Mililani Mauka, Waipio Acres) also announced her intention to introduce legislation in the 2003 legislature modeled on the Washington State precedent.

"The Washington state law -- unanimously passed by that state's House of Representatives and Senate and signed into law by Governor Gary Locke - provides a coordinated, humane response for victims of human trafficking through a review of existing programs and clarification of existing options for the victims," Gills said.

"As in Washington State, we hope to bring to the table our new governor and state lawmakers, law enforcement, academics, social service providers and the community to deal with a growing, recognized problem."

The task force will build on work already started two years ago by the coalition known as Protect Our Children From Sexual Exploitation, of POSCE, which includes the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Hawai'i Youth Services Network, Domestic Violence Clearinghouse & Legal Hotline, Hale Kipa, Inc. and other organizations, Gills said.

The Globalization Research Center (GRC) is a research unit of the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Established in 1998, the GRC conducts research on the dynamics and effects of globalization, with an emphasis on impacts within the Asia and Pacific region. The GRC is currently supported by a Congressionally-authorized grant administered by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) of the U.S. Department of Education.

The East-West Center is an internationally recognized education, training and research organization established by the U.S. Congress in 1960 to strengthen understanding and relations between the United States and the countries of the Asia Pacific region. A catalyst for cooperation and dialog, the East-West Center provides an open forum for exchange of diverse views and perspectives from all over the region.

Contact:

Peter Rosegg

808-371-7474, peter-rosegg@hawaii.rr.com