



CHILD PROSTITUTION IN BRAZIL

According to one Brazilian Congressional report, Brazil has the highest rate of child prostitution in Latin America and the second highest rate in the world. The Brazilian Centre for Children and Adolescents has estimated that there are 500,000 children involved in prostitution in Brazil.

BACKGROUND

The trafficking of women and children for prostitution is widespread and almost an institution in the Amazon basin of Brazil. Deception or force may be used and the girls become the slaves of the owners of the bars or brothels in the Amazon. Some police stations receive a weekly contribution from the owners of bars and brothels to ignore the sexual exploitation and little is done to stop this slave trade in which girls as young as 9 years old are enticed.

In an article dated June 21st 1993, Time Magazine estimated that 25,000 girls have been forced into prostitution in remote mining villages in the Brazilian Amazon. Rondonia, a region in the Amazon basin, is one of the main routes for the trafficking of child slaves. There they become not only prostitutes but also drug carriers. Many are dependent on drugs and become indebted to their owners who provide them with cocaine. Some observers consider that recruitment into the Amazon sex trade has become an almost professional activity and recruiters sometimes buy the girls directly from their family.

"Brazil War on Children", by Gilberto Dimenstein, states, "Girl prostitutes told of being sent back by their own mothers if they came home without money to buy food. Others said that policemen took their money and sometimes forced them to have sex."



In Brazil's two biggest cities, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, there are an estimated 150 thousand child prostitutes, boys and girls, controlled by a strong and organised mafia, working in bars, prostitution houses, massage salons and hotels.

REAL LIFE CASE STUDIES



1. In Foz de Iguacu, in the south of Brazil, a council investigation reported that children as young as eight are involved in prostitution, coming to the town from all over the country. Their photos and prices are presented in menu form for potential clients. Arriving in the city, sometimes fooled by the promise of a legitimate job, the young girls are enslaved, unable to leave the premises, made to prostitute themselves, their hair is painted, their documents falsified and their names changed. The report stated that the town judge and children's council were negligent, as they were reluctant to act against those using the children, many of whom were powerful and well-known public figures.

2. In the North eastern outback, the poorest region of Brazil, children are often forced to sell their bodies by their own parents, to the long-distance lorry drivers that travel the main motorways. In the poor interior town of Araripina, for example, children as young as eight prostitute themselves for as little as 1 real, or 30 pence. The highest price that a child can manage is 5 reals, about £1.50.

3. In the coastal North-Eastern cities of Brazil, such as Fortaleza, Recife and Salvador, children are also forced into prostitution by poverty. These are favourite resorts for foreign sex tourists, who arrive in the cities for the sole purpose of procuring sex with children.

4. In Belem, on the mouth of the Amazon, foreigners reportedly control the prostitution of children. According to the Prosecution Service, of the 114 prostitution houses in the city, 77 offer children from 11 to 17-years-old. Five of them are exclusively dedicated to the sexual exploitation of children, all five of which are owned by foreigners. A Kenyan mariner told a reporter from the Brazilian newspaper O Globo that Belem is the world's sexual paradise and that you can get a girl of whatever age you want whenever you want.

One experienced worker with Brazilian street children and child prostitutes has complained that the frequent demeaning sexual portrayal of young women and children in the Brazilian media helps create a mindset and culture where the sexual exploitation of such people becomes more acceptable.

In various State Parliamentary Commissions of Enquiry people in high positions including some politicians and judges have been discovered to have been involved in the sexual exploitation of children.



SUGGESTED ACTION

* Do write to your Member of Parliament (MP) and Member of the European Parliament (MEP) about the sexual exploitation of children in Brazil.

* Mention the above 7 points in your letter to your MP and ask your MP to raise them with the British Foreign Secretary, urging the British government to encourage the Brazilian authorities to implement these measures. You can write to your MP at: House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

* Urge your MEP to raise these 7 action points in a letter to the Brazilian ambassador encouraging the Brazilian government to implement them. If you don't know your MEP's name and address you can find this out by calling the European Parliament Information Office on 020 7227 4300.

Action to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Brazil should include the following measures:

1. Set up well-resourced and trained specialised police units to investigate sex offences against children.
2. Investigate and punish corrupt police officers and politicians involved in the sex slave trade.
3. More financial support for shelters and homes run by non-governmental organisations for children and youth who are victims of violence, sexual exploitation and abuse.
4. Greater mobilisation amongst the general public of the issue of sexual exploitation of children and the need to combat it. This should include encouraging members of the public to report incidents of suspected sex offences against children.
5. Conduct more State Parliamentary Commissions of Enquiry into the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children. These commissions should make thorough investigations, hold accountable those responsible and recommend and implement adequate action and legislation.
6. Strict guidelines on moral standards in the media should be enforced, thereby preventing the demeaning sexual portrayal of children and young women in the media. This should also involve an alteration to the way Brazil's famous Carnival is portrayed (with all its sexual undertones).
7. Taking stronger measures to tackle the underlying poverty which makes so many women and children vulnerable to being forced into prostitution.



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