

**THAILAND'S PROBLEM WITH THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN  
IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY**

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# THAILAND'S PROBLEM WITH THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to address the problem of female sex trafficking in Thailand because it is a serious human rights issue that degrades and marginalizes women. Presently, Thailand is a source, transit, and destination country for those trafficked in the sex industry. While sexual exploitation is a worldwide problem, it is especially prevalent in Thailand because of economic, socio-cultural, and political factors. The scope of this thesis will cover the years from 2000 to 2010 and will be limited to women being trafficked. It will not cover young children in the sex trade. The U.S. Department of State considers the sexual exploitation of women as part of human trafficking and, since 2000, it has published its Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report on a yearly basis. Unfortunately, since 2004, Thailand has been placed on the Report's Tier 2 Watch List because it has not shown sufficient improvements in combating sex trafficking.

This thesis is organized in five chapters. Chapter I, "Introduction: Background Information on Thailand and the Sexual Exploitation of Women Prior to 2000," will include a short history of the sex trade before the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Chapter II, "The Causes of Sex Trafficking in Thailand and the Methods of Recruitment of Female Sex

Workers,” will cover a definition of the term “human trafficking;” the economic, socio-cultural, and political reasons for the sex trade and how sex traffickers recruit their female victims. Chapter III, “The Work Conditions of Female Sex Workers in Thailand and the Adverse Effects of the Sex Trade,” will deal with the following issues: lodging and work; financial aspects; diet and healthcare; forms of punishment; and the adverse effects of the sex trade. Chapter IV, “The Reform Efforts Under the Four Main Thai Premiers from 2000-2010,” will examine the work of Chuan Leekpai (2000-2001), Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006), Surayud Chulanont (2006-2008), and Abhisit Vejjajiva (2008-2010) in suppressing sex trafficking in Thailand. Chapter V, the “Conclusion: Recommendations for Alleviating the Female Sex Trade in Thailand and Prospects for the Future,” will first propose ways whereby the Thai government can curb sex trafficking and will then discuss some prospects for the future.

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## CHAPTER I

### **INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THAILAND AND THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN PRIOR TO THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY**

The aim of this chapter is to provide the necessary background information on Thailand and on its sex trade over three periods: from the fourteenth century to 1945; from 1945-1975; and from 1975-2000. Overall, this thesis aims to analyze the sex trafficking problem in Thailand and to create awareness about the critical human rights violations there regarding the sexual exploitation of women. The scope of this chapter covers Thailand from ancient times until the end of the twentieth century. The organization is in five main parts. It will begin with some “Background Information on Thailand,” such as the geography, population, religion, government, and economy. The second part will discuss “Sex Trafficking in Thailand from the fourteenth century to 1945.” The third part will examine “The Sex Industry in Thailand from 1945-1975” while the fourth part will deal with “A Short History of the Sex Trade in Thailand from 1975-2000.” The conclusion will then provide a short summary of the major events in the history of Thailand that have led to the increase in sex trafficking in the twenty-first century.

Thailand has one of the worst sex trafficking records in Southeast Asia. The country is known as the sex capital of the world because of its widespread sex trafficking activities and because of the sex-related tourism associated with it. Thailand is a source, transit, and destination country for victims being trafficked for

commercial sex. The Thai government estimated that in 2008 there were about 250,000 sex workers residing in Thailand, but many scholars believe the number is much higher.<sup>1</sup> The issue of sexual slavery is not only a concern in Thailand, but a worldwide problem as prostitution is one of the oldest professions. As long as there is a demand for purchasing sex, sex trafficking will be rife. In order to understand the sexual exploitation of women in Thailand, it is important to first understand key background information about this country.

### ***Background Information on Thailand***

Thailand is situated in the center of the Southeast Asian mainland and borders Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Cambodia. Thailand's size is around 514,000 square kilometers, making it marginally smaller than Texas.<sup>2</sup> Its capital is Bangkok, which is also the most industrial urban area in the country. There are two major river systems running through Thailand, the Mekong River and the Chao Phraya River, and both are used to support irrigation and to transport Thai exports. Thailand is made up of four geographical regions: North, Central, South, and North East. The northern region of Thailand is a mountainous area covered in trees, and is home to a network of canals and rivers that drain into the Gulf of Thailand.<sup>3</sup> The central region (which includes Bangkok) is often referred to as "the rice bowl" because of its resources and its fertile soil.<sup>4</sup> The southern region of Thailand is pivotal for its production of rubber and tin. This area also has the largest amount of rainfall. The northeastern region, home to one-third of the population of Thailand, has poorer soils and the lowest per capital income.

## Map of Thailand



Source: *U.S. Department of State*, <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/ci/th/> (accessed September 7, 2012).

As of 2010, Thailand's population totaled around 66,000,000 people.<sup>5</sup> As for the country's racial composition, 80 percent of the population is Thai.<sup>6</sup> Around 15 percent is Chinese, the largest minority group.<sup>7</sup> Other minority groups include the Malays, Indians, hill tribes, the Burmese of Myanmar, and refugees from the Indochina countries. Ethnic Malay Muslims are found in Thailand's southern provinces. The hill tribes, found in the mountains in the north, include the Lisu, Karen, Mien, Akha, and the Hmong. As for religion, most Thai people are Theravada Buddhist. The approximately 5 percent of the population that is Muslim lives south near the Malaysian border.<sup>8</sup> Other religious groups in Thailand consist of Christians, Taoists, Hindus and Sikhs.

Thailand is a country that has never been colonized and was traditionally founded in 1238.<sup>9</sup> The government has been a constitutional monarchy since 1932.<sup>10</sup> The king of Thailand is the chief of state, and the prime minister is the head of the government. In 1939, Siam was renamed "Thailand," which means, "Land of the free."<sup>11</sup>

The poverty level in Thailand has decreased gradually since the 1980s.<sup>12</sup> However, the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis hit Thailand, causing the value of the Thai baht to decrease drastically. In 2001, Thailand's economy was able to recover from the crisis under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's economic policies.<sup>13</sup> As of 2010, Thailand had a lower middle-income economy that had seen substantial social and economic development within the last twenty years.<sup>14</sup> However, while parts of

Thailand experienced economic growth, poverty remained mainly in the rural areas, where 88 percent of the country's 5.4 million poor reside.<sup>15</sup> Thailand's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2010 was around 601.9 billion U.S. dollars.<sup>16</sup>

The abundance of different resources in Thailand has helped its economic growth. Its industries include textiles, tourism, electronics, jewelry, circuits, petrochemical, and auto assembly. Its natural resources are tin, rubber, natural gas, tungsten, tantalum, timber, lead, fish, gypsum, lignite, and fluorite. About 12 percent of the GDP is from agricultural resources, which include rice, tapioca, rubber, corn, sugarcane, coconuts, and soybeans.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Sex trafficking in Thailand from the 14<sup>th</sup> Century to 1945***

Throughout Thai history, there has been a close correlation between economic development, migration, and prostitution. As this country competed in the global market, prostitution proved to be a profitable business venture, not only with Thai nationals but with tourists coming to Thailand.<sup>18</sup> The history of prostitution in Thailand dates back to ancient times as Thai kings had a polygamous matrimonial system with harems, made up of wives and royal concubines who produced heirs to the throne. During this time, royal and noble women were used primarily as property by men of royal blood and often as a means of creating connections with other noble families.<sup>19</sup>

Most notably, the first form of sexual slavery appeared during the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767).<sup>20</sup> During this era, prostitution was permitted and, just like other businesses, the government taxed it. The houses of prostitution were located near the

capital of Ayutthaya, in an area that was occupied by the Chinese workers who used their services. This period also practiced the Sakdina System, a social hierarchy system under King Rama I (King Buddha Yodfa Chulaloke, 1782-1809), which connected social rank to the ownership of land. In this system, the highest ruling class consisted of a small group of royalty and nobles, followed by monks and novices, with serfs and slaves at the bottom of the hierarchy. Under the Sakdina System, women were also responsible for providing sexual services to Thai males who worked as peasants for the noble class.<sup>21</sup>

As Thailand began to have more contacts with the outside world, the name Siam became more commonly used among the royalty, foreigners, and learned people.<sup>22</sup> Forced sexual slavery existed and harems in Siam represented one of its earliest forms. Simon de la Loubere, a French nobleman in Siam in the late 1600s, documented the ill-treatment of royal women and commoners in harems, noting that both were harshly punished for adultery.<sup>23</sup> One consequence of infidelity was that a woman of royal blood would be forced into sexual slavery by being sold to a brothel. In extreme situations, she would be put to death.<sup>24</sup>

It was during the late 1600s that Chinese immigration in Thailand increased, with their males seeking the sexual services of Thai prostitutes.<sup>25</sup> Many of these Chinese men came to Thailand to work in the mining industry while others worked in the rice trade, further increasing the number of Chinese migrants coming into the city of Bangkok. Following the reign of King Rama I, the influx of Chinese migrants to

Thailand increased the rate of prostitution in the country.<sup>26</sup> For example, prostitution thrived in Sampeng, a well-known Chinese area in Bangkok, where men went to purchase sexual services. Most of the prostitutes in this area were Chinese, but there were also some Thai prostitutes there who acquired Chinese names to help the Chinese men feel at home. The Bowring Treaty of 1855, signed between Britain and the Kingdom of Siam, had created businesses with foreign workers, most of whom came from the southern part of rural China.<sup>27</sup> When the Thai economy began to prosper, more Chinese workers and Westerners arrived in Siam, becoming the new clients of the prostitutes.

Meanwhile, Westerners got a glimpse into the difficult lives of Thai women because of the writings of Anna Leonowens, a British governess in Thailand in the 1850s, who taught the children and the wives of the King of Siam.<sup>28</sup> In her memoirs, she depicted the misery and brutality of women locked away in the harems. Her memoirs were later fictionalized by American author Margaret Landon's 1944 novel, *Anna and the King of Siam*.<sup>29</sup> In 1946, this book also became a movie called *Anna and the King of Siam*.<sup>30</sup> In 1951, the book became a musical known as *The King and I*.<sup>31</sup>

Under Kings Rama IV (King Mongkut, 1851-1968) and Rama V (King Chulalongkorn, 1868-1910), many females involved in prostitution were known as "stationed women," slaves who could be sold by their masters.<sup>32</sup> It was typical during this time for women to be sold to prostitution houses. In these houses of ill-repute, the managers would keep an eye on the female slaves and make sure that they pleased their

clients. During the rule of King Rama V, prostitution was also regularly taxed in numerous provinces.<sup>33</sup> While visiting Bangkok, Thailand, the author of this thesis caught a glimpse of the “Vimanmek Mansion,” King Rama V’s manor that is made entirely out of teak wood. This mansion, built with eighty-one rooms, was used to house his wives, children, and concubines.

During this period, if a female slave was unmarried, she could be forced to serve as her master’s concubine or as a sexual partner if her master had a male guest. The status of women was further diminished when females were used as commercial transactions between foreign men. For example, some women who were not part of the royal class would trade sexual favors with merchants or foreigners in exchange for merchandise and other commodities. Sometimes they would become “temporary wives,” for lonely travelers who came to visit Thailand.<sup>34</sup>

It is also important to remember that traditionally, Thailand was a slave society. People became slaves due to several factors: being prisoners of war; being kidnapped in a raid; as payment for a crime, or due to debt bondage. In the case of debt bondage, people would even sell themselves, or more commonly their children or other family members, in order to pay back a debt.<sup>35</sup> Slavery in Siam lasted until 1905, when it was abolished by King Rama V.<sup>36</sup> However, although some women were now free, many drifted back into prostitution because they felt great obligation to support their families and to repay old debts, sentiments that still exist today among females in Thailand.

With the elimination of slavery, the Thai government began trying to figure out how it could incorporate its citizens into civil society.<sup>37</sup> Hence, under Rama V, men were required to enlist in military service and receive mandatory education.<sup>38</sup> When it came to women, however, Rama V stated that there were insufficient funds in the country's budget to sustain women's education, so they were left to support themselves.<sup>39</sup> As a result, since many women did not have financial means or learning opportunities, they found it easier to resort to prostitution in order to survive.

In the early 1900s, the Siamese government became more concerned about venereal diseases through prostitution and decided to adopt the practices of Western society in order to control the spread of these diseases. This was due to the fear that if people succumbed to a venereal disease; they would be unable to have children, which would decrease the population of Siam. Also with infected parents, the diseases would create adverse effects on the health of their children, giving them a shorter life expectancy.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Thailand passed the Contagious Disease Prevention Act in 1908, which stipulated that, if a prostitute registered herself, she would be allowed to conduct business in the sex trade.<sup>41</sup> This Act also stated that every house running a brothel was required to stick a green lantern outside the front door. The brothels soon became known as "green-lantern houses" and the prostitutes as "green-lantern women." These green light houses were required to pay a tax in order to remain legal and stay in business. There were also other prostitutes who were not registered with these brothels and they would go to bars and gambling areas to charge people for sex. At the same

time, the government did not want to legalize prostitution. Hence, the government passed the Venereal Diseases Act in 1909.<sup>42</sup> If one wanted to run a prostitution business, then he or she had to get a license, which had to be renewed every three months. In 1928, the Anti-Trafficking Act was also passed and it was used to fine anyone who tried to seduce or coerce a woman into prostitution or to force females to remain as prostitutes.<sup>43</sup> Although this Act was good in theory, it did not work in practice as prostitution was still legal at the time.

However, more changes were in store when absolute monarchy ended in 1932, making the country a constitutional monarchy. This transformation also changed traditional forms of polygamous unions to monogamous marriages.<sup>44</sup> For example, in 1936, polygamy was proclaimed illegal and the marriage provisions in the Civil Code were rewritten, allowing men the right to divorce their wives for adultery.<sup>45</sup> Women, on the other hand, were refused these same privileges. The practice of ending polygamy in Siam was put into effect partly as a means for Siam to enter “civil society” with other nations. Rulers like Rama VI (King Vajiravudh, 1910-25) and members of the elite class were initially against ending the practice of polygamy.<sup>46</sup> This king argued to keep polygamy, not because of tradition but because it provided some form of protection for minor wives, such as a wife who was sold by her parents, because it prevented her from being cast-off by society. Polygamy also provided protection for children born to minor wives, so that they would be considered legitimate children.<sup>47</sup>

In short, the growth of prostitution during the nineteenth and early twentieth century was due to the increasing numbers of Chinese immigrants and the widespread practice of slavery. Many of these Chinese men were ready to purchase sexual services in a society where prostitution and slavery were legal and even acceptable. Prostitution continued to remain a problem in Thai society because of extreme poverty and the obligations to the family, which in many cases led to debt bondage with women forced to pay back a debt that their family owed.

### *The Sex Industry in Thailand, 1945-1975*

After World War II, Thailand became less economically and socially tied to Chinese culture and turned more of its attention to Western civilization.<sup>48</sup> In the mid 1950s, Thailand was already a member of various organizations within the United Nations (UN), such as the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).<sup>49</sup> The relationship between the United States and Thailand became stronger after WWII when Britain tried to punish Thailand for having collaborated with the Japanese during the war years and the U.S. came to Thailand's rescue, preventing it from becoming a British protectorate. Since the 1950s, Thailand has received U.S. military assistance, such as equipment, training, and supplies.<sup>50</sup> In 1954, Thailand and the United States became treaty allies when they signed the Manila Pact, which established the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) to protect the region from communism. Bangkok became the site for SEATO's headquarters.<sup>51</sup> In the late 1950s, the United Nations

(UN), which had replaced the League of Nations began a more careful examination of the issue of sex trafficking and the sexual exploitation of women.<sup>52</sup> The UN also began pressuring Thailand to reform its laws on prostitution as Thailand was then its only Asian member to have endorsed brothels.<sup>53</sup> The UN wanted Thailand to get rid of the practice of licensed brothels. Thailand responded to this UN pressure; for example in 1960 it abolished the 1908 Contagious Disease Act and passed, instead, the Prostitution Suppression Act that made prostitution illegal in Thailand.<sup>54</sup> This, however, did not stop the country's growing sex entertainment industry. Massage parlors for sex began to show up in the 1960s and to become progressively more popular.<sup>55</sup> Although these sex establishments appealed to foreigners, they also appealed to the middle class Thai men who have always been the majority of the clients frequenting these businesses.

It was not until the official start of the Vietnam War in 1965 that the number of women involved in prostitution became more of a global issue. The U.S. military, particularly in Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand, created a larger demand for sex tourism in Asia. American soldiers on leave from the Vietnam War would go to these brothels in Thailand for rest and recreation (R&R) leave, and this fueled the sex trade. During the Vietnam War, Pattaya, still one of the most well known areas for prostitution in Thailand, was selected as an R&R location for American soldiers. It attracted women typically from the poorest northern provinces, like Chiang Mai and Phayao. The women would move to areas outside of the military airbases and urban

centers, where they would provide sexual services to U.S. soldiers. The 1960s also brought about other types of entertainment, such as sex shows and erotic dancing, and go-go bars, which first appeared in Bangkok in 1967.<sup>56</sup> These bars featured women who would entertain men by dancing on the stage and spending time with their customers after the performance. By the late 1960s, there were around 40,000 U.S. military members stationed at bases around Thailand and many used the services of the Thai prostitutes.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, during the 1960s to 1970s, prostitution in Thailand increased dramatically.<sup>58</sup> It went from approximately 20,000 women working in the sex trade in the late 1950s to 171,000 engaged in that trade by 1964.<sup>59</sup> In 1970, part of the U.S. military spending of \$20 million in Thailand was solely on sex tourism.<sup>60</sup> Many military officials believed that prostitution was a vital part of maintaining social order. For many soldiers, prostitution was used as a reward, for emotional support, and as a way to avert rape of the local women.<sup>61</sup> War records show that soldiers around the world have used women for their sexual needs and as a coping mechanism. During the Vietnam War, a woman could be hired as a temporary wife for a U.S. soldier, to do housework, and provide sexual services in exchange for money and gifts.<sup>62</sup> When this U.S. soldier left Thailand, he typically did not take his temporary Thai wife with him. The view that American men had of Thai women for sex services led to the decreased status of the women, as being regarded as lowly prostitutes.

Meanwhile, in 1966, the Thai government implemented the Entertainment Places Act, which was used to control places where women typically would provide sexual services to clients.<sup>63</sup> The Act allowed law enforcement officials to inspect these places and shut them down if they found out that sexual services were being offered. The owners of these popular venues, like karaoke bars or spa salons, needed a license from the local police to operate their business. The problem with this Act, however, was that it proved insufficient in limiting the sex trade because most Thai law enforcement officials were too lenient or corrupt to actually enforce any laws. In the end, many of these businesses went unregistered, allowing their operators to hire women under other pretext, such as entertainers or waitresses. The business owners also profited from prostitution if the sexual service occurred away from the business venue. Another negative side of the Act was that women were being punished and arrested for soliciting sex, while their male clients were not.<sup>64</sup> The 1966 Act showed that the government was actually promoting sex in the entertainment industry by using the image of Thai women to encourage tourism. For example, one international airline used the following advertisement: “Some say it’s our beautiful wide-bodied DC-10s that cause so many heads to turn at airports throughout the world; we think our beautiful slim-bodied hostesses have a lot to do with it.”<sup>65</sup>

In this connection, the U.S. military had a profound effect on the supply and demand for prostitution. The growth of entertainment centers around U.S. bases was still prevalent even after the Vietnam War ended. Even when the U.S. troops left their

bases in Thailand to return home, tourism in general began to fuel the demands of the sex industry. The first upsurge of tourists who came to Thailand were Americans and Europeans, but by the 1970s, Japanese participation in the Thai sex industry exceeded all other countries with the introduction of all-inclusive package tours to lower class Japanese men.<sup>66</sup>

### *The Sex Trade in Thailand, 1975-2000*

Despite the efforts of the Suppression of Prostitution Act, the sex industry in Thailand grew phenomenally with the expansion of sex tourism and the use of technology. The 1970s saw the rise of sex tourism in Southeast Asia, which was dominated by men, with 80 to 90 percent of them from Japan in 1979.<sup>67</sup> It was during this period that some Japanese companies even rewarded their male employees with sex tourism packages for their hard work. The boom in sex tourism was created during the Vietnam War in the 1960s. Thus, from the 1970s through the 1980s, the demand for sex by Japanese male clients only intensified the business for sex.<sup>68</sup>

In Europe, the Thai sex trade was also increasing in Germany, with sex traffickers selling Thai girls for \$1,000 each in Frankfurt to prostitution rings and brothels.<sup>69</sup> In 1977, one Thai welfare worker went to Germany to bring home a discarded prostitute left on the street and saw more than 1,000 Thai girls working as prostitutes there.<sup>70</sup> In fact, one way that Europe was using its surplus of prostitutes was by selling Thai wives to their men through traffickers. The “Thai sex-marriage tours” were even advertised in men’s magazines where a typical ad would offer men three

weeks in Thailand. By week three, the men could pick the bride of their choice. The official marriage documents would be signed over and the men would pay anywhere from \$1,500 to \$3,000 for a girl.<sup>71</sup> Germany soon became the leading European market for Thai prostitutes.<sup>72</sup> In the mid-1980s, Thai women were beginning to be trafficked to Australia, where presently around 1,000 Thai women are brought over for sexual slavery every year.<sup>73</sup>

From 1985-1995, because of the launch of Thailand's economic reform program, the Thai economy began to take off at one of the fastest rates in the world.<sup>74</sup> The adverse effect of this growth was that it created marginalized groups of people in different regions of the country. In the 1980s, poverty in the rural territories was five times higher than poverty in the urban environments like Bangkok.<sup>75</sup> The North and the Northeast area of the country's two most impoverished regions became poorer because of export-led industrial growth coming out of Bangkok. The increasing productivity in agriculture in Thailand has been responsible for the job loss in agricultural employment for women and an increase in job opportunities for men. Particularly in the Thai middleclass, men have more disposable income, and some of them use it to buy sexual services. Economic development has increased the size of the sex trade and has created more disparity between the poor and wealthy classes.

In the 1980s, Deputy Prime Minister Boonchoo Rojanasthien gave a speech during a conference in Thailand in which he recommended that one way to increase tourism was to offer sex entertainment in the provinces.<sup>76</sup> While some government officials

supported the sex industry, the Thai government did try unsuccessfully to limit the sex trade by shutting down many Japanese and Asian sex tours in Thailand. Although it did diminish foreign advertisement of sex in Thailand, it also created a more contrary effect on the industry. Rather than offering sexual services in Thailand, Thai women began to be trafficked overseas to urban areas like Tokyo, Japan. Today, even in Japan, Thai women can be found in brothels, bars, hotels, nightclubs, restaurants, and often in the homes of the traffickers.

Meanwhile, the number of international tourists to Thailand jumped, from two million in 1981 to four million in 1988, and to more than eleven million in 2003.<sup>77</sup> In 2003, two-thirds of the tourists who visited Thailand were single men.<sup>78</sup> The 1980s was a period of exponential growth in sex tourism for Thailand as it increased from 200 million baht (over six million U.S. dollars) in 1960 to more than thirty-seven billion baht (over 1.2 billion U.S. dollars) in 1986.<sup>79</sup> By 1988, sex tourism made up 15 percent of the revenue from the exports of goods and services.<sup>80</sup> The rise in the sex trade in Southeast Asia grew from global economic development, producing an upsurge in inexpensive travel where hotels, airfare, and businesses conveniently connect sexual services into all-inclusive tour packages.

The early 1980s caused a stir when HIV/AIDS first appeared in Thailand.<sup>81</sup> At first, the disease was dismissed as affecting only foreigners but not Asians. Then, during the mid 1980s, the cases of HIV reported were mainly among the networks of gay men in bars and the homosexual prostitutes serving foreign men and Thai nationals.<sup>82</sup> As a

result, Thai Health Ministry officials and many health experts even dismissed the threat of the AIDs epidemic in the country as a whole because they believed it was a disease that could only be spread by homosexuals, Thai or foreigners.<sup>83</sup>

In the 1980s, the number of people infected with this disease was never made public, which sparked controversy that the Thai government was trying to protect the interests of the sex tourism industry.<sup>84</sup> It was not until the media got involved that the government was asked to provide more information on the disease, especially to those in high-risk jobs. The media then exposed that the government's initial interest was the profitability of the sex industry rather than the protection of the public's health. Despite the media bring attention to the HIV/AIDS problem, the disease continued to spread, particularly among those involved in the sex trade. In 1987, for instance, sex workers were either oblivious to the existence of the disease or they did not think that the disease could hurt them or their clients.<sup>85</sup> The Thai government, NGOs, and family also did not make enough attempts to educate sex workers on HIV/AIDS or on protective measures. However, by the late 1980s, some businesses were requiring women to undergo routine blood tests for HIV as well as enforcing the use of condoms with customers.<sup>86</sup> Families and friends typically abandoned the prostitutes infected with AIDS, and they would eventually die alone.

Meanwhile, the growing number of AIDS cases created a greater demand for younger prostitutes, since they were thought to be virginal and have less of a chance of carrying the virus or other sexually transmitted diseases. Hence, traffickers in Thailand

took in young rural northern girls.<sup>87</sup> While some girls were aware that they would be working as prostitutes, many of them had no idea they were being sold into the sex industry to work at bars and brothels. It was during the 1980s that thousands of women from Thailand were also being trafficked overseas to work in the sex industry.<sup>88</sup>

In the mid-1980s, the reports of police corruption became more apparent to the public as a result of the role of the media.<sup>89</sup> For example, an article in the newspaper *Thai Rath* pointed out that law enforcement authorities were reluctant to make any arrests because government officials, politicians, and the police were clients of the brothel business. Meanwhile, in 1982, the Women's Lawyers Association of Thailand dealt with a case concerning sixty-two women who were confined to one hotel where they were forced to have sex with clients.<sup>90</sup> One of these women was able to send a letter to the Crime Suppression Division telling them that the women were all being held captive. However, when the case was turned over to the police precinct in that area, the women were immediately sent back to work in the hotel.<sup>91</sup> This incident shows that the police were not protecting victims of sex trafficking, since these women were sent back to work in the sex trade. Instead, the police were helping the traffickers and receiving kickbacks.

The 1980s also brought about a sequence of brothel raids which, unfortunately, backfired many times because only the prostitutes would be arrested, while the clients, brothel owners, and human traffickers easily fled the scene.<sup>92</sup> This was because a brothel raid would often be known in advance as the police would tip off the owners,

who then had time to escape and even get rid of the women they didn't want in their business. The police would typically arrest the women left behind. When the costs for brothel owners increased, this, in turn, meant that prostitutes had to work harder.

In the meantime, reports of human rights abuses and slavery in brothels in the 1980s led to the formation of various international organizations and women's rights groups. One major tragedy which brought attention to the plight of sex workers was the death of five women in 1984 who were trapped in a burning brothel in Phuket's red light district.<sup>93</sup> These girls were locked in their rooms, and two of them were chained to their beds. This tragedy raised the issue of the exploitation of women in the sex industry and led to an increase in women's rights groups, which were outspoken about human trafficking and women's issues. They found it unacceptable that women were penalized while the males seeking their sexual services went unpunished. In 1985, a conference by the Girl Guides and the Association for the Promotion of the Status of Women (APSW) on "Men's Development for Women's Development," stated that "trafficking of women and profiteering from this trade, coupled with lax enforcement of laws on prostitution, are due to the activities of certain men."<sup>94</sup> The key point of the initiative was not to put the blame all on women, but to point the finger at men who should change their own behaviors and help find a solution to the problem.

By the 1990s, the Thai government really started to feel the threat of AIDS because an alarming number of people in Thailand tested positive for HIV.<sup>95</sup> It became clear that this epidemic was no longer a sickness confined to only homosexuals or gay

prostitutes, as people had once thought, but a disease that can be transmitted to others in the population. This fear of AIDS led to a decrease in the number of brothels in Thailand.<sup>96</sup> The AIDS panic also prompted the Thai government to host the 1990 conference on “The Role of Government and Non-Government Organizations in Preventing and Correcting Sexual Business Service.”<sup>97</sup> There, a medical doctor, Meechai Viravaidya, reported extreme rates of HIV infection among the prostitutes in the northern province of Chiang Rai.<sup>98</sup> Since the 1970s, this doctor had become well known for promoting the use of condoms around Thailand.<sup>99</sup> One new initiative from the 1990 conference was giving a prostitute a green card if she turned out to be negative during an AIDS screening. Another initiative was that businesses within the sex industry that did not use condoms were to be temporarily closed until they complied with the new laws.

The AIDS epidemic also brought about the need for men to change their sexual behavior. In 1993, Dr. Weerasit Sitthitrai, the Deputy Director of the Red Cross Program on AIDS, said that rather than purchasing sex as a form of power, men should see “buying sex as the most disgusting thing in the world.”<sup>100</sup> Following his remark, an attempt to change the attitude in young Thai males about sex was shown in a poll taken in 1997 of 4,000 males in their late teens to early twenties.<sup>101</sup> Of those polled, 60 percent said it was “not ok” to have sex with prostitutes, even though half of them had experienced sexual intercourse with a sex worker.<sup>102</sup> Less than 29 percent of those polled said that it was “good to have your first sexual experience with prostitutes in

order to learn about sex.”<sup>103</sup> This excuse is typical for young men who visit brothels for the first time. Other efforts in the 1990s to try to create a more egalitarian society with women included the Seventh National Development Plan (1992-1996), which was the first plan that signified the importance of family values.<sup>104</sup> This plan highlighted the roles of fathers and husbands, and how males could share in household responsibilities with females.

In the 1990s, the Thai government became more concerned about how it and the nation in general were being depicted in global media outlets.<sup>105</sup> This was because a 1991 *Rolling Stone* magazine had published the article “Death in a Candy Store,” by Richard Rhodes, which asked the question “Why is Thailand the Whorehouse of the World?”<sup>106</sup> In addition, a *TIME Magazine* article, with a bar girl on its front claimed that there were two million prostitutes in Thailand’s sex trade.<sup>107</sup> Thai leaders became worried about negative representations that suggested that the government did not know how to properly run the country. In 1993, there were reported instances where the government made an effort to bring to light the seriousness of Thailand’s prostitution problem because of the harsh criticism from the media.<sup>108</sup> The publicity from these types of critical media prompted the *New Longman Dictionary for English Language and Culture* to depict Bangkok as a city “often mentioned as a place where there are a lot of prostitutes.”<sup>109</sup> Moreover, in 1995, a Microsoft CD-ROM encyclopedia portrayed Bangkok as a “flesh trade center where there was danger of contracting AIDS.”<sup>110</sup> BBC television also recognized Thailand as being an extremely

dangerous tourist attraction because of violence and the widespread AIDS outbreak.<sup>111</sup> In the 1990s while some Thai officials admitted the need to do something about the sex trafficking problem. There were still many more who were indifferent about trying to resolve it.

Also in the 1990s, tens of thousands of Thai girls were found working in other countries, most notably in Japan.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, in Europe, another several thousand Thai prostitutes were working in the sex industry.<sup>113</sup> In Germany for instance, Thai prostitution was still increasing. Some Thai women were also forced into prostitution because of failed marriages with German men. Prostitutes from Thailand were then very desirable in Europe because they were normally more subservient and willing to work for less pay than European prostitutes. Over the years, there have also been an increasing number of foreign women working in the sex industry in Thailand, with a large majority of them from Southern China and from the hill tribes of Myanmar. Thai officials have estimated that around 25 to 35 percent of women entering the sex trade are from Myanmar, of which 40 to 60 percent are already HIV positive.<sup>114</sup> In 1991, these estimates revealed more than 200,000 Thai prostitutes working outside of Thailand.<sup>115</sup>

In the 1990s it was still apparent that the Thai government continued to support the sex industry. In March 1993, for example, the Governor of Songkhla, in the southern province of Thailand, proposed the idea that prostitutes would not be allowed to return home for the Thai New Year.<sup>116</sup> Instead, they would be shown during the Thai

New Year (Songkran) parade in scandalous clothing because their participation would attract more foreign tourists. The Thai government also supported the sex industry through indirect financial means, such as paying for many tourism companies that promoted sexual services through hotels and restaurants.

Beside government corruption, the Thai government made feeble efforts to curb the prostitution problem. For example, in 1996, the government under Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-Archa gave an order that it would close bars and clubs at 1:00 a.m. rather than at 2:00 a.m., a difference of only an hour.<sup>117</sup> This was a result of the Western media's reports about Thailand's growing sex industry. Within weeks, however, businesses were back to normal hours and the streets were again flooded with sex tourists. This shows the Thai government's half-hearted attempt to limit some of the commercial sex businesses that operate late at night.

Meanwhile, several laws and acts were passed in response to the growing awareness of the exploitation of women within the sex industry. One law under Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-Archa was the 1996 Prostitution Prevention and Suppression Act, implemented to report the problems of prostitution and to reform social attitudes about females, in particular male attitudes towards women and children.<sup>118</sup> This Act also focused on stronger penalties for the traffickers than for the women and children forced into sexual service. Hence, women charged with prostitution were fined, while those charged with human trafficking and with coercing girls into sexual slavery were punished with jail sentences. Under this law, parents who sold their child into sexual

slavery could also be punished. This law was praised by the international community, which saw it as a step in the right direction against human rights abuses. Women's rights groups were displeased, however, that the law still punished women even though these women were the victims of crime.

Under Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, another law, the Measures in Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Women and Children Act in 1997 prohibited trafficking and was aimed at human trafficking crimes, and at granting more authority to law enforcement officials to suppress crimes already prohibited by earlier legislation.<sup>119</sup> In June 1999, Chuan Leekpai's office, the Director General of the National Police and the Director General of the Public Welfare Department signed the "Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the Common Guidelines for Agencies Concerned with Cases where Women and Children are Victims of Human Trafficking".<sup>120</sup> The main goal of the MOU was to set strategies for government agencies on how to respond to trafficked women, children, and immigrants, while also assuring the protection of human rights for trafficked victims. Before this MOU, trafficking victims from overseas were treated as illegal immigrants in Thailand. The MOU also created rules for state agencies to provide humanitarian assistance for victims, including admission to shelters and safe passage homes. These new laws focus on punishment for those that are trying to force women and children into the sex trade by imposing heavier fines and prison time. Sadly, despite the new legislative measures, sex trafficking still persists in Thailand because many law enforcement officials do not

understand how to identify trafficking victims. There is still ample corruption within the government, with many officers accepting bribes, not taking action against sex traffickers, and not reporting sex work related cases. Although there are harsher penalties against sex traffickers, most victims continue to be too terrified to seek out help from the police.

In addition to these legal initiatives, the Thai government established several reform programs to prevent the trafficking of women. One program was The National Education Act, which was passed under Leekpai in 1999, to keep girls in school by extending the required level of education by three years, from six to nine years.<sup>121</sup> The Thai government also attempted to provide women better prospects for a wider variety of occupations through career training programs. Since 1999, the Occupational Assistance Division of the Department of Public Welfare, for example, has been providing 3-6 month courses throughout the country for women between fourteen and thirty-five years old.<sup>122</sup> Important programs like these were created to give underprivileged women more employment opportunities so that they need not be forced into prostitution. The 1990s also helped pave the way for more AIDS awareness programs in Thailand, such as the NGO Coalition against AIDS.<sup>123</sup> Because of the success of these AIDS awareness programs, by the year 2000, the number of people infected with the AIDS was under one million.<sup>124</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, it is clear that sexual exploitation of women existed throughout the history of Thailand. The increase in prostitution began with the growth of the rice export economy and the increase in Chinese immigration to Thailand. During the Vietnam War in the 1960s, the prevalence of prostitution increased when U.S. soldiers were stationed in Thailand for rest and recreation (R&R), further encouraging the brothel business. By the late 1980s, AIDS in the sex industry was becoming a larger problem in Thailand, creating more awareness about the human rights abuse that sex workers face in this industry.

One of the most apparent trends in the sex industry in Thailand over the last ten years is the increase in women being recruited from neighboring countries and overseas to work in Thailand. There has also been an increase of migrant women being trafficked in and out of Thailand as part of the sex trade. International tourism has expanded greatly, with the promise of cheap sexual services in Thailand as the main attraction for travelers. The sex trade can be linked to customs in ancient Thailand where, traditionally, sexual slavery was practiced and accepted. The fear of AIDS in the 1990s prompted greater community alertness of sex trafficking issues, leading to more programs and initiatives by the year 2000 to help women who had been forced into the sex trade. However, more public awareness and more government action are needed to deal with the sex trafficking problem in Thailand. As the next chapter will show, there are many reasons why Thai women become victims of sex trafficking, as

traffickers use various methods to coax and coerce women into the sex industry in the up to 2010.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE CAUSES OF SEX TRAFFICKING IN THAILAND AND THE METHODS OF RECRUITMENT OF FEMALE SEX WORKERS**

The aim of Chapter II is to discuss the reasons behind the female sex trade in Thailand and how these sex workers are recruited. It will also explain why some women in Thailand become easy targets for traffickers. The scope of this chapter will cover a ten-year period from 2000 to 2010. The organization is in six different parts. Part One will provide “The U.S. Department of State’s Definition of the Term ‘Human Trafficking’.” Part Two will cover “The Economic Causes of Sex Trafficking,” such as extreme poverty, insufficient jobs, and lack of training while Part Three will discuss “The Socio-Cultural Causes of Sex Trafficking,” like the lower status of women, gender inequality, and obligations to the family. Part Four will examine “The Political Causes of Sex Trafficking,” such as weak government, political corruption, crime syndicates, and immigration issues. Part Five, “The Methods of Recruitment for Sex Workers,” will look at some recruitment techniques that traffickers use to coerce women into the sex trade. Part Six, the “Conclusion,” will give an assessment of the causes of sex trafficking and the recruitment of female sex workers. This chapter will also include the author’s personal observations on the sex trade during her trip to Thailand in October 2012.

### ***The U.S. State Department's Definition of the Term "Human Trafficking"***

There are many definitions associated with human trafficking, but this thesis uses the one by the Department of State, which defines human trafficking as follows:

Trafficking in persons or "human trafficking" have been used as umbrella terms for activities involved when one person obtains or holds another person in compelled service. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) describes this compelled service using a number of different terms: involuntary servitude, slavery, debt bondage, and forced labor.<sup>1</sup>

Although there are two main definitions associated with the term human trafficking - forced labor trafficking and forced sexual slavery - this thesis concentrates on sex trafficking. According to the U.S. Department of State:

Sex trafficking occurs when an adult is coerced, forced, or deceived into prostitution – or maintained in prostitution through coercion – that person is a victim of trafficking. All of those involved in recruiting, transporting, harboring, receiving, or obtaining the person for that purpose have committed a trafficking crime. Sex trafficking also can occur within debt bondage, as women and girls are forced to continue in prostitution through the use of unlawful "debt" purportedly incurred through their transportation, recruitment, or even their crude "sale" – which exploiters insist they must pay off before they can be free.<sup>2</sup>

Each year, the State Department publishes its *Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report*, which is used to evaluate the extent to which foreign governments are dealing effectively with the problem of human trafficking.

### ***The Economic Causes of Sex Trafficking***

It is estimated that as of 2010 the Thai sex industry employs 150,000 to 200,000 young girls and women, although the exact number remains unknown.<sup>3</sup> The number of prostitutes currently in Thailand could be as high as 2 million.<sup>4</sup> It is also

estimated that one in ten of these sex workers were forced into sexual slavery.<sup>5</sup> Many of these girls will be trafficked all over the world, with Japan, Europe, Australia, and North America as some of the most popular destinations. Each year, thousands of women are forced into the sex trade, driven by their most important needs, to survive and to earn an income.

In Thailand, one of the major economic causes of human trafficking is the extreme poverty in the country. Traffickers are able to target poor girls because they are vulnerable and in desperate need of income to survive. Young women are often trafficked from the impoverished Northern regions of the country to cities like Chiang Rai and Mae Hong Son. These poor areas are home to the hill tribes and other ethnic minorities, and are where Thailand's poorest population lives, lacking some of the most basic necessities like clean water and electricity. Typically the victims are less educated and without occupational training. They also do not understand the government's laws or their own rights and privileges. From the rural areas, the girls are sent to the urban areas of the country, where prostitution is mainly found, especially in Bangkok and in the central regions where the average prostitute makes around 3,000 baht (about 100 U.S. dollars a month), which is about three times the pay in an agricultural job.<sup>6</sup> In some rural areas fathers sell their daughters for money to help the family survive economically. These locations, in particular, are near the borders with Myanmar, where girls are trafficked into Thailand. Economic disparities in neighboring countries perpetuate illegal migration from Myanmar, Laos, and

Cambodia into Thailand, where traffickers maximize the situation to move their victims into sexual labor.

Another major cause of human sex trafficking is the lack of education or training for women, particularly in the rural parts of Thailand. Women without training or skills are easy prey for traffickers since they have no other job alternatives and are desperate for income. These conditions force young girls to seek jobs elsewhere and traffickers can easily trick them by promising jobs in restaurants, cleaning services, and in hair and nail salons. The recruiters will generally offer these girls a better life and will tell these girls that if they follow them they will have a steady salary and their families will be taken care of with the money that they earn. Many women will remain within the prostitution industry because they feel as though they will not earn as much in other professions. In the sex trade, they do not require occupational training or career qualifications.

The following case study shows how a young Thai girl was lured into the sex trade because of poverty and her lack of education and training. In this case study, Lisu, a twenty-two year old girl, was trafficked from Thailand to Malaysia. Siddarth Kara, an activist and author who met her in 2004, recounts Lisu's terrible story in his book *Sex Trafficking, Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*.<sup>7</sup> Lisu came from a village in the Chiang Rai district, where she was part of the Mien Hill Tribe. A woman named Daow, who came to the village, convinced Lisu to go to Bangkok with her, promising her that she would get a nice job as a cleaning lady and be paid a good salary. Lisu

was put on a bus with other young girls and traveled to Bangkok. From there they went south to Singapore. When they got to Singapore, the traffickers paid 1,000 baht (around 32 U.S. dollars) for each girl, and Lisa and five other girls were sent to a hotel and locked in two rooms. Daow then came back to the room and gave the girls short skirts and tops and told them that they could not wear any underwear and that each night the girls would have to have sex with their customers.

Lisu and the girls refused to do what they were told, with the result that all of them were locked in their rooms for two days without food, until the third night when they agreed to work. Lisu and some of the other girls were then taken by a Thai man into the woods near the hotel where they were taught how to place condoms on customers. They were also told that they would be working from 8:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. each day and were shown six small cubicles with brick walls, each with a cot and a plastic sheet. The men who usually came for sex were Malaysians, Chinese, Thais, Arabs, and Westerners. The men would pay 20 Singapore dollars (around 15 U.S. dollars) for 20 minutes of sex. When they were done, the women were told that they had to clean themselves and their clients. At the end of each night, the owners threw the plastic sheets out in the garbage. Lisu does not know how long she was in the hotel, but one day a customer finally helped her escape.<sup>8</sup> After Lisu told her story, she said: “I wish I could make a television commercial telling everyone what happens to trafficking victims. I wish I could help poor people have a better life so they will not be treated this way.”<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, the economic causes of sex trafficking in Thailand have allowed the sex trade to become a very lucrative business. Since the sex trade in Thailand is linked to its tourism business, sex traffickers reap huge profits by offering sexual services to tourists. Thailand has already earned a reputation for providing cheap and exotic sex to travelers. To increase profits, the traffickers continuously seek younger and more attractive women to lure customers and make more money. They often pursue migrant women with lighter skin because they are considered more attractive and can bring in more revenue. The customers are men with high incomes who seek entertainment, escape activities, and inexpensive sex. Typically, tour coordinators will offer all-inclusive packages that feature airfare, hotel accommodations, and the main attraction - sexual services from prostitutes.<sup>10</sup> These tours to Thailand are easy to locate. An Internet search of the words “adult travel” pulls up numerous websites offering consumers sex tours that package together leisure and sex with young girls. Foreign men have admitted that they enjoy seeking women in Thailand, because they won’t be rejected and, instead, are treated like “kings.”<sup>11</sup> One man in his forties described his trip for pleasure to Thailand as follows: “I found a very pretty girl and – it’s an ugly word – hired her for a week...choosing no longer came into it, but there was the pleasure of having her as a servant not so much as a woman.”<sup>12</sup> Law enforcement officials also profit from the sex trade because they are willing to accept bribes from the traffickers as they are paid low salaries.

### *The Socio-Cultural Causes of Sex Trafficking*

There are many sociocultural factors that contribute to human trafficking in Thailand. One is the lower social status of women, due to Theravada Buddhism, which considers men as more valuable. In Thailand, around 90 percent of its citizens are Theravada Buddhist, a stricter sect of Buddhism than Mahayana Buddhism.<sup>13</sup> This lower status of women is linked to early Theravada Buddhist views of women, which historically viewed women as subservient to males.<sup>14</sup> Because of the large Theravada Buddhist culture in Thailand, women have always been seen as inferior, especially in rural villages. In some interpretations of the Theravada Buddhist text, being born as a woman is viewed as punishment for having done bad things in a previous life.<sup>15</sup> There are even some Buddhist writings, which indicate that prostitution is acceptable because women are supposed to satisfy men's sexual needs.<sup>16</sup> Theravada Buddhism also puts great importance on the hierarchy of rebirth as a sign of spiritual progression with females placed on a lower level of rebirth than males. On earth, there is the king, then the monks, the wealthy, the men, the women, the crippled, the destitute, and the animals. One Theravada Buddhist view of women is that the greatest achievement they can have is to obtain enough karma to be reborn as men so that they may one day become monks and achieve *nibban*, or Nirvana, since women cannot become monks.<sup>17</sup>

Under Theravada Buddhism only males can be monks and only monks can achieve enlightenment. The author became aware of the lower position of women when she was walking in Bangkok near some of the popular Thai temples, like the *Wat*

*Phra Kaeo* (The Emerald Buddha) and the *Wat Pho* (The Reclining Buddha), and seeing monks in their orange robes. One Thai tour guide told her that, because she is female, she could not touch the monks or give them anything directly. Theravada Buddhism also believes in accepting one's faults and destiny. Therefore, when a girl is forced into sexual slavery, she must learn to accept her destiny. In the twenty-first century, acceptance of destiny has become a coping mechanism for the thousands of Thai women who have been forced into human trafficking.<sup>18</sup>

Another sociocultural factor contributing to an increase in sex trafficking is the issue of gender inequality in Thailand. One example is the insufficient job opportunities available to women. Men have better educational and career openings than women and typically receive higher wages than women, especially in industries like information technology and engineering. Women, on the other hand, usually work in low paying jobs, in hair salons and restaurants. Gender inequality is also a major factor in Thailand when it comes to Thai wives, who, because of their subservient nature, do not stop their husbands or sons from going to visit sex establishments.<sup>19</sup> Even after polygamy was declared illegal in 1934, Thai society still found it acceptable for a male to seek out sex from prostitutes.<sup>20</sup> An alarming 90 percent of Thai men have visited a prostitute at least once and about half of them had their first sexual experience with a prostitute.<sup>21</sup> This, along with the low Theravada Buddhist perception of women, objectifies women as only tools to satisfy men. There are three traditional Thai proverbs that reflect how women are looked at as subservient to men: "To have a

daughter is like having a toilet in your front yard”; “A woman is only worthy when she has a husband”; and “Women are buffaloes, men are humans.”<sup>22</sup> Gender inequality is rooted in Thai history with women being regarded as subordinate to men. For example, Thai women did not have the same marriage rights as males in that only men were allowed to engage in polygamy. Some Thai men thus had several wives. In these cases, there was usually a major wife chosen by the parents, a minor wife used to produce more children, and a slave wife used for sexual indulgence.<sup>23</sup> Many of these wives were forced into arranged marriages by their family; they were not given any options as to whether they wanted to be a part of such an arrangement.

A third sociocultural factor behind human trafficking in Thailand is the deep obligation to the family. In Thai culture, obligation to the family is also known as filial piety, or “*bhunkun*,” in which the youngest daughter is expected to provide financial support to her parents.<sup>24</sup> In this custom, women are sold or sell themselves into brothels to provide for their families, with the idea that they can buy their freedom once they pay back their debt. Young girls feel it is their responsibility to support their parents and they thus resort to selling their bodies for money. In Thai families, men will show gratitude to their parents by working hard and becoming ordained monks for a temporary period of time before marriage. This ensures that their parents receive karmic merit. Since women cannot become monks, they show appreciation by caring for their parents financially or by acting as their caregivers. It is also the duty of the

female to “marry up” so she can maintain good economic ties with her husband’s family.<sup>25</sup>

Some of the traffickers are even family members or friends of the victims. They will often go with the girls to the Thai border where they will receive compensation for selling the girls. Some traffickers will promise a young girl marriage to a wealthy man, only to trick her and sell her to a brothel.<sup>26</sup> Typically, the money paid for a girl will range from 10,000 baht (about \$350U.S. dollars) to 20,000 baht (or \$750U.S. dollars).<sup>27</sup> This payment then becomes the victim’s debt that she must pay back with interest through sexual slavery.<sup>28</sup> This bonded labor, or debt bondage, is one of the lesser-known forms of slavery today, although it is one of the most common. Families in desperate need of money will sell themselves or their children in exchange for a loan. A female will then become a bonded laborer, with her work as repayment of part of the loan.

A woman paying back debt bondage is often tricked into working seven days a week for very little money. If she is in the sex trade and requires medical treatment for an abortion or a sexually transmitted disease, often the cost of this treatment is added to her debt.<sup>29</sup> Sadly, many victims are lied to about their debt. For example, they are told that they owe an amount that was never agreed upon and that they must pay back this debt if they ever want to be free again. Girls as young as twelve years old are purchased into a debt bondage situation and trafficked into Thai brothels, usually for no more than \$800 U.S. dollars.<sup>30</sup> In one case, a young Thai girl was allowed to send

money back to her family. She gave details of her time in the brothel, stating that she had to have sex with at least 300 men per month to pay her rent at the brothel and to have sex with around 540 men a month in order to pay off her debt bond, food, and other expenses.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, NGOs have reported twelve to eighteen-year old girls being trafficked from China, Myanmar, and Laos into Thailand because of debt bondage.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes, this happens in a family where the father becomes disabled or dies, or if the family's farm fails, reducing the family to poverty. As a result, the daughter or daughters maybe sold into sexual slavery. While selling daughters diminishes the family's debt, it also provides workers, servants, and prostitutes for the Thai economy. Some girls are also thrown into the sex trade because of sexual violence and shame within their own family. For example, one mother sold her daughter into the sex trade because her daughter had been raped when she was nine years old.<sup>33</sup> Hence, a poor family selling a daughter is not an uncommon event in Thailand.

Thai families are also selling their daughters into the sex trade in order to obtain material luxuries. One survey points out that some parents in the Northern region of Thailand have felt pressured to adapt to the modern world, which means that they may easily feel compelled to sell their daughters to buy new television sets, cell phones, or other electronic appliances.<sup>34</sup> In one case, a woman trafficked by her family members voiced some resentment of her neighbor when he boasted about the wealth that he had gained from selling his own daughter: "I just hate those parents who keep bragging about how much money they receive from their daughters. Didn't they know

how much suffering their daughters must go through, how many men they had to sleep with so the parents can show off their latest models of mobile phones and their huge gold necklaces?"<sup>35</sup> Because of growing consumerism in Thailand, more of its young women are in danger of becoming victims of sex trafficking.

In the second case study, authors Andrea Parrot and Nina Cummings share the horrific story of a girl named Ying in their book *Sexual Enslavement of Girls and Women Worldwide*.<sup>36</sup> Ying comes from the Myanmar and China border where her family lives in poverty. When Ying was sixteen years old, a neighbor told her family members that they could have more income if they sent Ying to Thailand to work. Everyone in Ying's family agreed to this idea and the neighbor went with Ying to the Thai border. However, after crossing into Thailand, Ying was handed to a man who forced her and three other young Burmese girls to stay at his home. Then, for three days, all the young girls were held as prisoners and forced to have sex with multiple Thai men.

After that, Ying was taken to Bangkok where she and thirty other girls under the age of eighteen were brought to another house. There, the girls were forced to work at a local massage parlor as prostitutes. When one of the girls tried to refuse to work, she was repeatedly beaten and raped. Ying was locked up in a dark room without food and water for three days. This abuse ended in October 1998, when Thai police infiltrated the secret brothel and arrested Ying, along with twenty-two other girls and the manager of the establishment.<sup>37</sup>

The girls were then charged with prostitution. Since Thailand did not have a program for the victims of trafficking at that time, no one knows exactly what happened to Ying and the other girls. Often, these girls are just deported back to their country of origin. When they return, they are usually sick and afraid that the sex traffickers will come back to traffic them once again. Many of these women go on to live lonely lives, often ashamed of what has happened to them. They will often live apart from friends and family.<sup>38</sup>

### *The Political Causes of Sex Trafficking*

Besides the economic and socio-cultural causes of sex trafficking, there are also the political causes. One main political cause is the weak government in Thailand. This is clearly seen in Thailand's law enforcement, as many traffickers are not being penalized for their crimes. Instead, the victims are the ones punished. Many Thai police do not have sufficient understanding or training about anti-trafficking laws, making them unable to properly identify victims of the sex trade. Moreover, some law enforcement officials are apathetic to the plight of the sex worker's suffering in the sex trade.

Thailand's weak government is also mirrored in the country's weak judiciary system. For example, in December 2010, the police's anti-trafficking unit, with assistance from NGOs, raided an apartment in Bangkok and removed twelve Uzbek trafficking victims.<sup>39</sup> Others who were likely also victims were returned to the streets or taken to the Thai Immigration for deportation. The alleged trafficker, an Uzbek

woman, was initially jailed during a police investigation, but in February of 2011 obtained bail at court and resumed her involvement in Bangkok's sex industry.<sup>40</sup> This case shows the failure of Thailand's judiciary system because the trafficker in this case was not harshly punished and returned to her life as a sex trafficker, recruiting more victims into the sex trade. The victims did not receive any help as compensation for being forced into the sex trade. Instead, the victims were deported and some resumed their lives as prostitutes.

Corruption is another political cause of the sex trade. There has been evidence of both low and high-level police involvement in aiding the traffickers, by accepting bribes for favors and by letting brothel owners operate openly even though prostitution is illegal in Thailand.<sup>41</sup> Many traffickers will bribe law enforcement officials to the point where they can flout the law. One example was in Mai Sai, a Northern Thailand province, where some brothels have been known to pay police every month for each girl who is brought in so as to avoid a police raid.<sup>42</sup> Some law enforcement officials have even been known to frequent these brothels for sex. Other cases have shown Thai police to be active participants in the trafficking of girls. For instance, there have been reports that police in Northern Thailand have taken part in trafficking women from Myanmar to brothels in Thai cities like Chiang Mai, for around 2,000 baht per trip (around 65 U.S. dollars).<sup>43</sup> In another instance, in July 2003, fifty police officers in the Bangkok Metropolitan Police Department were taken off active duty for accepting bribes from brothels.<sup>44</sup>

There are several reasons why Thai police turn to bribery and corruption. Many of these Thai police officers are paid low salaries, making it easier for them to be tempted by payoffs. There also seems to be a blatant disregard for the law, with numerous reports that local police protect brothels and other sex businesses against periodic raids. They will often accept money from sex trade operators in exchange for tipping them off about government raids. The Thai police take an apathetic approach to prosecuting cases of sex trafficking that involve Thai officials and law enforcement. A police officer suspected of trafficking in 2007 was convicted, fined, and fired, but did not serve any jail time for his involvement in sex trafficking.<sup>45</sup>

Another political cause of sex trafficking is the various crime syndicates working with drug and prostitution rings in Thailand. There are at least seven “families” in Bangkok that are involved in the recruiting, soliciting, and trafficking of women from all over the world to work in the sex industry.<sup>46</sup> These organized crime groups will forge fake travel documents and passports and set up travel itineraries with agents representing overseas sex businesses in places like Japan, Australia, Canada, and the U.S.<sup>47</sup> Human trafficking, which includes sex trafficking, is now the third largest organized criminal activity in the world, next to arms and drug trafficking<sup>48</sup> Crime syndicates in Thailand steadily collect their profits through local prostitution rings, either by expanding ones already open or simply by forming new ones. Today, Thailand’s sex trade exploits women from all parts of the world.<sup>49</sup>

The most dominant crime organization in Thailand is the *Jao Pho*, which means, “godfather” in Chinese.<sup>50</sup> The majority of the members in this group are ethnic-Chinese businessmen and their assistants, who have both lawful and criminal business interests. This crime group has turned to increasing its profits by its involvement in the sex industry. It establishes the greatest profits by associating with powerful military figures, government officials, and law enforcement officers and by bribing these groups with money. *Jao Pho* has been known to transport women from Myanmar into Thailand and from Thailand to the United States for the sex trade. Many *Jao Pho* members will even operate these brothels themselves. In places like the United States, the *Jao Pho* makes sure that women are moved to different sex establishments every few weeks so that they are not detected by law enforcement officers.<sup>51</sup>

Thailand’s sex industry is not the result of a single crime group but rather a multitude of criminal networks working with government officials.<sup>52</sup> Besides the Thai crime syndicates, a Japanese crime organization, called the *Yakuza*, has been known to traffic Thai and foreign women into Japan for sexual slavery. According to the Japanese Immigration Bureau, 14,334 Thai nationals were living in Japan illegally as of 2004, with most of the women working as prostitutes or in brothels as waitresses at bars.<sup>53</sup> The *Yakuza* organizes sex tours for Japanese and other Asian businessmen to travel for pleasure throughout Asia. Japanese *Yakuza* members often buy resorts and golf courses in Thailand to increase their profits by mixing resort facilities with sex

tourism. The exact number of Thai sex workers being trafficked into other countries is not known, but the amount of money being earned by these criminal organizations is significant. For instance, Wanchai Roujanavong, Senior Expert State Attorney in the Office of the Attorney General in Thailand claims that about 45 to 54 billion baht (more than 1.5 billion U.S. dollars) is earned each year, making this activity more lucrative than other illegal businesses.<sup>54</sup>

Yet another political cause of sex trafficking is connected to the immigration issues in Thailand. This is mainly due to the government's inability to keep track of border and immigration control cases. It is common for women from countries experiencing economic destitution, political turmoil, and social volatility to be singled out by traffickers. Women trafficked into Thailand typically come from Cambodia, Laos, China, and Myanmar. Thousands of Uzbek women have also been brought into Thailand's sex industry.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Russian women are trafficked to Asia for prostitution, and many end up in Thailand.<sup>56</sup> The repatriation process between the Thai government and international law enforcement agencies is a long one, and sometimes victims are confined to government shelters for several years. NGOs have reported complaints by some international victims stuck in shelters who feel that the Thai government does not handle their repatriation in a timely fashion. These victims often feel pressured to remain in shelters to assist with prosecution cases. Language barriers, fear of being hurt by traffickers, anxiety over being deported, distrust of Thai officials, slow legal processes, and the financial needs of victims all play roles in why some

women choose not to participate in the Thai government's legal process. These women are also unable to earn money during the hearings. Some of them have thus tried to escape from government shelters, while others are too frightened to try. The government has stated that it encourages victims of sexual slavery to come forward and participate in the prosecution of sex traffickers.<sup>57</sup> Still, many victims do not realize they have this opportunity to speak up.

### *Methods of Recruitment of Sex Workers*

Sex traffickers are getting cleverer with the different ways that they recruit women for the sex trade. In the last ten years, with the increasing demand for sex in Thailand, traffickers have focused more attention on the rural regions with the migrant populations for recruitment purposes. Thus, traffickers often prey on poor, vulnerable women from the poor areas where women have less education and fewer job opportunities. Migrant women are easy prey because they do not speak the native language and do not know the local customs. Their families are usually ignorant of the dangers that their daughters face once they go with the traffickers. The traffickers will hence use deceptive measures to lie to naive family members by promising them that if they give up their daughter, she will have a better life. Other deceptive measures occur when a sex trafficker recruits young girls into the sex trade by first seducing them. For example, a trafficker will pretend to fall for a young girl romantically, only to abuse and force her to have sex with other men for money. The sex victim is trapped, fearing that if she attempts to escape, the traffickers may kill her or hurt her family members.

Another way girls are recruited is through abducting them from the villages, the cities, and from the border areas. Sometimes, these girls have been snatched up off the streets while others are first drugged and kidnapped.<sup>58</sup> In many of these kidnapping cases, the traffickers physically abuse women to the point where they are too frightened to leave the sex trade. Women who are kidnapped and taken to other countries are stripped of their passport and identification, making it harder for them to seek help from the authorities. Many of those who are kidnapped are young girls because traffickers believe these girls are free of venereal disease or of the HIV/AIDS virus. Moreover, male clients usually prefer younger girls since their bodies have not gone through the strains of childbirth. Some of these girls are vulnerable to abduction because they are also escaping persecution or some other hardships in their country. Traffickers thus use these reasons to their advantage.

A third method of recruitment uses women to lure other women into the sex trade because females are perceived, falsely, as trustworthy. In any case, they are better at persuading other females to leave their home to find work.<sup>59</sup> These women usually visit small villages in expensive clothing to show off to the families that they are wealthy. In some instances, these women will pretend to work for a recruitment agency and will bring fake documents, photographs, and portfolios to prove that what they say is true.<sup>60</sup> Some of these female traffickers used to be prostitutes themselves in the sex industry.<sup>61</sup> An example of a female recruiting another female into the sex trade was shown in the first case study of Lisu, when a female trafficker named Daow tricked her

into joining the sex trade. As in Lisu's story, female traffickers will use false promises of jobs in restaurants and factories to earn an income.

A fourth method traffickers use to recruit women is offering families who are in desperate need of money a loan that they must pay back. A female family member typically repays this loan. She will sell her body in the sex trade to earn money for this repayment. Some families know that their daughter is being sold into sexual slavery but will still sell her because they are in desperate need of income. They believe that sending their daughter abroad will help bring back great riches to the family. The daughter will normally not have any influence on the family's decision to sell her into sexual slavery. Some of these women will still go with the traffickers because they believe that being sold into prostitution will only be temporary and then they can one day return to their family.<sup>62</sup>

### *Conclusion*

There are many different economic, sociocultural, and political factors associated with why sex trafficking occurs in Thailand. Of these three, the most important is the economic problem. Within the economic causes of sex trafficking, poverty is most important because women need monetary resources in order to survive. Extreme poverty makes women desperate enough to seek out work in the sex industry. The sex trade in Thailand has been driven by the wide economic gap in Thailand between the rich and the poor and by limited training and job opportunities for women. Poverty is the main reason why traffickers have been successful in unspeakable

practices like kidnapping, torture, and abuse of women. Poverty is also the reason why some sex workers remain in the sex trade because they can make more money this way than working on farm doing agricultural work.

Changes are needed on the socio-cultural and political level in order to curtail sex trafficking in Thailand. These two factors come right after economic causes for the sex trade. Under socio-cultural causes, the lower status of women should be addressed first. It's imperative for women to be viewed in a positive light and be treated as human beings rather than as objects to satisfy men's needs. Without changing the attitudes of the culture towards women, female sex trafficking will continue to persist. Trying to change gender inequality should be the next priority, since in many cases, men are still receiving better career openings. It's important to show that women can take on entrepreneurial roles and be just as well-educated as men in order to help get rid of gender based stereotypes. The deep obligation to support their families is a cultural view that does not need to change, however, parents should still be educated that they should not sell their children into the sex trade. This is why it is important to first change the lower status of women and gender inequality so that families will begin to value their daughters, the same as their sons.

In addition to socio-cultural causes, the political causes of sex trafficking must be address because these two causes feed off each other. Traffickers, for instance, will take advantage of Thailand's weak and corrupt government by bribing Thailand's law enforcement officials so they may evade the law and continue to traffic poor desperate

girls into Thailand's sex trade. This is why corruption seems to be the worst political problem in Thailand because if the government cannot crackdown on law enforcement officials who take bribes and accept sexual services from sex workers, the sex trade will continue to flourish. Weak government is the second biggest factor since weak law enforcement and a weak judiciary system have allowed traffickers to leave with little or no penalties. Weak government has allowed for higher officials like politicians to engage in facilitating the sex business in Thailand by taking bribes to keep quiet about the sex trafficking problem. The immigration issue is the next biggest concern in Thailand since the lack of control on Thailand's borders has created an influx of migrant women into Thailand. All of this is due to weak government not being able to train their police about language barriers and cultural differences with women from other countries. In return, these migrant women will refuse to work with law enforcement because they fear being punished by the traffickers and being deported. The last major political cause is criminal syndicates whom are also largely involved in the trafficking of girls while working closely with other foreign criminals.<sup>63</sup> One effective way to crackdown on crime organizations is to first strengthen the government and then to curtail corruption because the weak law enforcement and the use of bribery have enabled crime syndicates to easily move trafficked victims and migrant women throughout the country and overseas for the sex trade.

There are also various methods that traffickers use to recruit women. In the first recruitment method, traffickers prey on vulnerable women who are in desperate

economic conditions and will do anything for income. They will use deceptive measures and target poor women who are less educated. They will also promise naive family members that their daughter will get a better life if she leaves with the traffickers. Other women are forced into the sex industry by abduction and kidnapping. If they try to escape, the traffickers will threaten and beat the women into submission. A third method of recruitment, and an increasing trend, is women recruiting young girls into the sex industry because female traffickers are perceived as being trustworthy and safe. Another recruitment technique that traffickers are using is offering desperate families a loan that the daughter must repay to earn her freedom.

While this chapter has focused on the causes of sex trafficking in Thailand and the methods of recruitment of female sex workers, Chapter III will look at their work conditions and the adverse effects of sex trafficking.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **THE WORK CONDITIONS OF FEMALE SEX WORKERS IN THAILAND AND THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF THE SEX TRADE**

Chapter III aims to address the horrendous working conditions of sex trafficking victims in Thailand and to shed light on how these women are exposed to illegal confinement, rape, physical abuse, forced labor, drug abuse, malnutrition, unsanitary conditions, and even death. It will also discuss financial aspects, diet and healthcare, some forms of punishment, the adverse effects of sex trafficking, and include an assessment with recommendations to better the welfare of women in the sex industry. The scope of this chapter will cover sex work conditions from 2000 to 2010 as documented from actual cases in Thailand. To show the dismal work settings, this chapter is broken down into six parts. Part I, on “Lodging and Work,” will include the living conditions and work of sex workers. Part II will cover “Financial Aspects,” the prices for sex charged by brothels, crime syndicates, and some individuals, and the income earned by the sex workers. Part III will discuss “Diet and Healthcare,” such as food options, health facilities, and exposure to drugs and venereal diseases. Part IV will examine some “Forms of Punishment,” especially the use of violence as seen in beatings, which can result in cuts, broken bones, and traumatic injuries including reproductive complications and death. Part V will deal with several “Adverse Effects of Sex Trafficking,” like the spread of diseases, rising corruption, and moral decay. Part VI, the “Conclusion,” will provide an assessment of the work conditions and some recommendations for improving the healthcare of women forced to work in the sex

trade. This assessment will show why more attention is needed to improve the overall health of women in the sex business. This chapter will also include the author's personal observations of women in the sex industry during her trip to Thailand in 2012.

### *Lodging and Work*

The housing situation and place of work for women in the sex trade vary depending on the traffickers. Some women live in brothels, hotels, and massage parlors, while others live in private residences and are usually sent to various areas to work. These girls are often crammed into tiny living quarters or cubicles where they live and where their bed is no more than a small concrete bunk. Most girls will sleep in the same place where they take their clients to have sex. Some areas where girls are found selling their bodies are at go-go clubs, karaoke bars, and various other business establishments.<sup>1</sup> The housing conditions in one brothel in Ranong, a southern province of Thailand, featured small cubicles, which extend two by two-and-a-half meters, and contained tiny cement bunks where the girls were forced to have sex with their clients.<sup>2</sup> There were also secret doors and passageways used to hide the girls in case of a police raid. Often, the smell of the place is nauseating since there is little room for good hygiene and the toilets do not work properly.<sup>3</sup>

The first sex establishment that the women arrive at is rarely their final destination. Instead, most women will stay in a brothel for up to a year or more, after which the owners will typically move these girls around to other venues.<sup>4</sup> Although many females are coerced into the sex business, some will agree sign a contract in which they acknowledge they will have to sell their bodies. This agreement may tell a woman

that she must sleep with hundreds of customers in order to cover her debt.<sup>5</sup> Many of these women, however, are not told other information; that they can be kept in these brothels against their will; that their passports can be withheld by the traffickers and that they can lose their identity and freedom as sex workers.

The pervasiveness of the sex trade is all over Thailand. The author of this thesis was very aware of this when she ventured one night in October 2012 into Patpong Market, which is nestled in one of Bangkok's red light districts. Although the market itself is a shopping destination aimed at tourists, as it features bootleg DVDs, knock off purses, watches, and other counterfeit items, it is also surrounded by the busy sex industry. This district is lined with entertainment go-go bars with bright neon lights and women sitting outside the bars waiting for customers. The women, dressed in skintight bikini tops and short skirts, and with faces heavily made up, will smile when men walk by. Inside the clubs one can see women dancing on poles, and in more private and secluded areas, other women will put on sex shows. The red light district caters to tourists wanting to view these sex shows. Around every corner, the men associated with these shows will hang out paper programs listing what the sex shows offer, such as tricks and deviant sex acts that the women are willing to perform for money. These men approach both male and female tourists in hopes that they may be interested in watching these sex shows. Some of the bars will even offer special treatment for an additional charge. If a client is willing to pay more, there are even programs offering full sexual services.

### *Financial Aspects*

Many of the sex workers receive little or no money for their sexual services. Some of them are in the sex industry because they are paying back a personal debt as part of a debt bondage deal to support their family. Those who are paid money have reported getting around only 30 baht (\$1.20 U.S. dollars) a day, which is why tips are so important in this particular business.<sup>6</sup> When a female sex worker earns money, she only gets to keep a small portion of it because most of it goes to the traffickers. Sometimes a trafficker will send a small portion back to the sex worker's family to pay off their debt. A sex worker will also have to pay back additional money that is added to her debt to cover clothes, cosmetics, and even necessities like food. In the northern city of Chiang Mai, the prices in 2000 for sexual services were as follows: for a 30 minute sex massage, around 100-150 baht (2.50-3.75 U.S. dollars); for having a girl for one hour of sex, it is typically 200-400 baht (5.00-10.00 U.S. dollars), for having a girl for the full night, it is usually around 1,000 baht (25.00 U.S. dollars) and for having a girl as a sex worker for a whole week would cost around 5,000 baht (125.00 U.S. dollars).<sup>7</sup>

Usually, these girls will be put on display in a lineup for clients to choose them, sometimes with a number assigned to each individual girl. This way, rather than knowing her name, a client can point to the girl's number to indicate that he wants her. These girls are forced to work long hours, often seven days a week. On average, they are forced to work ten to eighteen hours a day and twenty-five days a month, with normally a few days off during their menstrual cycle.<sup>8</sup> Some girls are even forced to

have sex when they are menstruating. Records have shown that some brothel owners resort to making sex workers stop their menstrual cycle so that they could keep working everyday.<sup>9</sup> On average they will see five to fifteen clients a day. In one case, a group of Burmese girls in Thailand reported that they worked ten to fourteen hours a day.<sup>10</sup> Some Burmese migrants working in Thailand stated they had an average of ten customers a day and sometimes even twenty clients a day on weekends, and that they never had any choice in choosing their customers and the type of sexual services they would perform.<sup>11</sup> In 1996, another study of sex workers in brothels in Bangkok found that 426 of them worked an average of twelve to sixteen hours a day.<sup>12</sup> These women had to do whatever their clients and the brothel owners demanded of them.

One Thai sex worker, Mai from Phang Nga, a southern province of Thailand, recounted the number of hours she was forced to work while in the sex trade. “I worked from morning to late in the night - it depended, but usually from eight or nine to noon for lunch and to 4p.m., when we had a break, and had dinner and a shower, then till midnight.”<sup>13</sup> Mai added that the brothel owners also kept a record of the hours of work. According to her “if there was a customer, we worked till he finished.”<sup>14</sup> Girls could also be hired for an entire day as long as clients left a deposit or identification.

### ***Diet and Healthcare***

While paying off their personal debt, many female sex workers are also responsible for paying for their own food items and personal healthcare. They do not have the option to go to the stores and or to cook when they get hungry during work. Instead, they have to purchase food nearby that comes already pre-made and is more

costly. Their diets are usually very poor, mainly consisting of carbohydrates, like noodles or fast foods that are cheap, but lacking in protein. Female sex workers also suffer from malnutrition, poor hygiene, and dehydration. Moreover, there is little food and nutrition available to them since typically male clients prefer women who are thin. Hence, these sex establishments only offer their sex workers a small amount of food.

When it comes to healthcare, most women are required to pay for their medical costs if they are in need of them. Many sex workers never visit a doctor because they cannot afford to do so. Some will forgo seeing doctors out of fear that their brothel owner will add these medical expenses to their debt. There is also very little education on birth control measures for sex workers. If one becomes pregnant, she is forced to have an abortion, which is illegal under Thai law, except in the case where a pregnancy is due to rape, incest, or if it jeopardizes the life of the mother.<sup>15</sup> However, illegal abortions are available in Thailand in certain clinics and back rooms.<sup>16</sup> Whether legal or illegal, abortions can result in complications, such as septicemia or blood poisoning.<sup>17</sup> Problems can also arise from difficult pregnancies and from childbirth, due to hemorrhaging and high infant mortality.<sup>18</sup>

Despite being pregnant, some sex workers are still abused. For example, one twenty-seven year old sex worker was forced to have sex with her customers, despite being six months pregnant.<sup>19</sup> In another case, pimps beat a sex worker who was three months pregnant in order to induce a miscarriage. Other women in the brothel later took her to the hospital where she was said to be in critical condition.<sup>20</sup> In yet another

case, a woman was forced to have sex with her clients just days after she had given birth.<sup>21</sup>

To prevent pregnancies, brothel owners usually force the sex workers to use contraceptives. This happened in the case of some young Burmese sex workers who claimed that they were given contraceptives in pill form. They also claimed that they were not told how to take them correctly, resulting in some taking three or four birth control pills a day.<sup>22</sup> In one instance, a twelve year old girl was given birth control pills and started hemorrhaging, but the brothel owner still refused to take her for medical help.<sup>23</sup> Besides birth control pills, the brothel owners sometimes give contraceptives in the form of injections, like Depo-Provera.<sup>24</sup> When injections are used, doctors are hired by the brothel owners to inject the sex workers. In some cases, the brothel owners will inject the women themselves.

Not only are sex workers forced to take contraceptives, but they are also exposed to sexually transmitted diseases and other serious illnesses, including HIV/AIDS. Some women go through routine health care providers to test for STDs and are given birth control measures, but serious illnesses are almost always untreated. In preventing STDs, the use of condoms varies among establishments; often women can only use condoms at the discretion of the brothel owner or the customer. The use of condoms protects the sex workers from contracting venereal diseases through regular, oral, or anal sex. Some traffickers will charge clients more for very young sex workers, as the traffickers know that they are virgins and do not carry diseases. In these cases, a condom is often not used. Sadly, many of these young girls will contract HIV

from their clients by having unprotected sex. The use of condoms can also be negotiated in certain businesses. For instance, some sex workers claimed that they felt they did not need to use a condom if their client did not appear to be sick or was handsome.<sup>25</sup> Some studies have shown that these women will use condoms less often when they are with sexual partners they've been with before.<sup>26</sup> Other sex establishments may not enforce the use of condoms and may not even supply condoms to their workers. In some cases, if a sex worker refuses to have sex with a client regardless of whether a condom is used, the brothel owner or pimp will force her to do so, using threats.

Since there is little to no health care provided to these trafficked women, they often succumb to venereal diseases like herpes or hepatitis A, hepatitis B, syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia that, if left untreated, often lead to long-term health problems.<sup>27</sup> Some of the more serious untreated illnesses can result in Pelvic Inflammatory Disease, causing infertility, tubal pregnancy, and chronic pelvic pain. Sometimes a sex worker will even need a hysterectomy.<sup>28</sup> If a sex worker requires medical care to treat a sexually transmitted disease or to undergo an abortion, she is responsible for bearing the medical costs.

Besides health problems, another adverse effect of sex trafficking is addiction to alcohol and drugs. Alcohol is largely used by sex workers, and has led to alcoholism and to liver damage.<sup>29</sup> Drugs are pushed by crime syndicates and traffickers are known for giving drugs to their sex workers. Many girls end up addicted to drugs in order to cope with having sex with multiple partners and with depression. Some of these drugs

like heroin and methamphetamine are shared through needles and injected into the bloodstream. Examples of drugs that are used by prostitutes in Thailand include Yaba, cocaine, and marijuana.<sup>30</sup> Women in drug-induced states are less inclined to use condoms and are more at risk of becoming pregnant or of contracting a sexually transmitted disease.<sup>31</sup> Injected drugs can also lead to skin infections, endocarditis, sepsis, and thrombosis.<sup>32</sup> Crime organizations involved in drug trafficking are also known to give drugs to their prostitutes.

### ***Forms of Punishment***

One significant form of punishment is the use of violence on sex workers by their pimps or brothel owners. For example, when they try to escape the sex trade, their pimp or brothel owner will brutally beat them as punishment. This punishment usually results in cuts, broken bones, and traumatic injuries to the mouth and head. The punishment can also result in neurological damage, back pain, and gastrointestinal problems. Moreover, they can suffer reproductive complications due to other forms of violence against them. In some cases, the brothel owner or pimp will rape these females as punishment for disobedience and in other instances women have been murdered. For most of them, violence has been in every aspect of their lives since childhood. They have suffered physical beatings and it is estimated that two-thirds of these sex workers have been assaulted as children.<sup>33</sup>

Besides physical violence, most sex trafficking deals with some form of captivity or abuse. This abuse is verbal, emotional, or physical. They experience verbal abuse when the brothel owners tell them they are worthless and call them other

derogatory names to further their feelings of depression and hopelessness. They suffer emotional abuse through illegal confinement, when they are locked up in a room with no food or water for several days until they are so hungry and exhausted that they will agree to do sex work. The trafficker hurl physical abuse at the sex workers, when they slap, beat, or kick them. The following story, in the 2010 book, *Half The Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, tells the story of a young girl named Srey Rath and some of the inhumane punishments she endured as a sex worker in Thailand.<sup>34</sup>

Srey Rath is a Cambodian girl who, at fifteen years old, was promised a dishwashing job in Thailand by an agent.<sup>35</sup> However, when she arrived in Thailand she was immediately given to a crime organization and trafficked to Malaysia. In Malaysia, a man known as “the Boss” told her that he had paid a lot of money for her and that she had to pay him back by having sex with multiple clients to earn money in order to settle her debt.<sup>36</sup> The first time that she was locked in a room with a customer, she fought back but was severely beaten and raped by her boss and by other members in the crime organization. “You have to serve the customers; if not, we will beat you to death,” her boss told her.<sup>37</sup> Her boss would threaten her and brutally beat her if she did not cooperate, showing the horrible forms of punishment that sex workers like her usually faced. She was even forced to take what they called “the happy drug” that would make her languid and obedient as a sex worker. She was also forced to smile and pretend to be happy at the sight of her clients, or her boss would threaten that he would kill her. Men would pay more money if the girls showed that they were eager

and excited to see them. Srey Rath was required to work in the brothel seven days a week for fifteen hours a day. She and other girls in this brothel were kept nude to prevent them from pocketing any tips and to make it harder for them to run away. She was told she could not ask her clients to use condoms. Furthermore, Srey Rath was not allowed to go out nor was she given any payment for her work.<sup>38</sup>

### *Adverse Effects of Sex Trafficking*

One of the terrible consequences of sex trafficking is the exposure to disease, especially among sex workers who are prevented from using protection. The worst disease in Thailand is HIV/AIDS, which is the number one cause of death of adults under the age of fifty.<sup>39</sup> In 2007, out of all the Southeast Asian countries, Thailand had the highest number of HIV/AIDS related cases. That year, an alarming 50 percent to 70 percent of sex workers who were interviewed and tested were in fact, HIV positive.<sup>40</sup> In 2009, there were about 530,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in Thailand.<sup>41</sup> That year, within a group of nineteen Burmese sex workers in Thailand who were tested, fourteen tested positive for HIV/AIDS.<sup>42</sup> Often, these girls contract HIV/AIDS not only from unprotected sex but from sharing needles for drugs and from being injected with the contraceptive Depo-Provera.<sup>43</sup> When a female sex worker is tested positive for HIV, she is often kicked out of the brothel, and has to return home, where she is usually unwelcomed by her family, even if it was the same family that sold her into the sex trade. Sometimes, family members will build a small isolated living area for the rejected woman to stay. While visited occasionally and brought some food, she

typically lives alone and dies in solitude.<sup>44</sup> Thus, she is shunned from society despite having been a victim.<sup>45</sup>

Another terrible effect of sex trafficking is the rising political corruption in Thailand. In some cases, Thai policemen have been guilty of accepting bribes and free sex. Some have even been responsible for raping some of the sex workers. Many officers are still paid low wages, making them susceptible to bribes or offers of free sex. There are a number of police officers who have not reported sex trafficking offenses. Instead, some have even alerted brothels or sex businesses ahead of time regarding police raids. Since the sex tourism industry attracts travelers from all over the world and generates billions in revenue, many top officials and police officers have turned a blind eye to this problem.

A third negative consequence of sex trafficking is the moral decay in Thailand. One example of moral decay is the breaking up of families involving a mother, daughter, or a sibling having to leave the family due to work in the sex trade. These types of losses to the sex trade create absences of family members and family disruptions. Sadly, some Thai families are so desperate for money that they allow the females in the family to enter the sex trade. When they do so, there is the absence of a maternal figure, the loss of a wife, and the departure of a sibling, all tearing at the fabric of society. A second example of moral decay from the sex trade is the devaluation and the demoralization women. Sex trafficking exploits women, instilling misogynistic views of women in Thai society. Traffickers and pimps do not show any respect to these women and even clients do not think of them as humans, but rather as

disposable properties. For tourists seeking inexpensive sex, they no longer look at these girls as human beings, but as tools to satisfy carnal desires. This is why Thailand is known as the sex capital of the world, tarnishing the image of a beautiful country. A third example of moral decay is the loss of values due to an emphasis on money, which is earned through sex trafficking. For money, parents will sell their daughter for material possessions, regardless of the breakup of the family unit and regardless of all the suffering that their daughter will have to endure in the sex trade. Likewise, due to greed, sex traffickers will resort to immoral behavior in order to reap high profits from a sinful activity.

### ***Conclusion***

The work conditions that sex workers suffer under include illegal confinement, rape, physical abuse, drug abuse, exposure to diseases, and murder. All these conditions are examples of human rights violations. These women will often receive little to no money in the sex trade while they work to pay off their debt. Their living conditions are deplorable, unsanitary, and unsafe, and they have very little food or healthcare available to them. Those who are in desperate need of health facilities and nutrition are often confined to the sex trade for a longer period of time in order to pay back the extra expenses that they owe to the traffickers. Otherwise, they will go for years without seeing a doctor, as they cannot afford this added expense. The sex workers who become pregnant are forced to either abort their fetuses or, in some cases, to work throughout their pregnancy. Under such difficult circumstances, they are

constantly exposed to STDs, like HIV/AIDS. If untreated, these diseases can also spread from client to client through unprotected sex.

Other conditions of the female sex workers are also very grim. They are often exposed to physical and verbal violence, and drug and alcohol abuse. In the most extreme cases, they suffer death. Many women who are in desperate need of medical attention are refused help because they lack the funds. Moreover, they are afraid that the medical expenses will be added to their debt. Sometimes, they are refused help because there is a strong social stigma against helping women in the sex trade. Those women who have refused clients or tried to escape have been met with brutal punishment that have left them with bruises, broken bones, severe lacerations, and even death. Some of the adverse effects associated with sex trafficking are the spread of diseases, the rising political corruption, and the moral decay, which rips families apart and demeans women.

These conditions show why it is so importance that the government provides better healthcare for sex workers. Public health officials have been known to give sex workers free condoms, but it is often up to the client as to whether or not a condom will be used during sex. One way to provide better health care is to provide free condoms for sex workers. However, as it has been shown earlier in this chapter, it is also up to the client and brothel owner.

Another way that the government can provide better healthcare is by allowing sex workers the access to seek medical attention for abortions and other emergency cases at medical clinics and hospitals and drug treatments at rehabilitation centers. The

Thai government should also provide mobile roadside clinics throughout Thailand and medical doctors and staff at border checkpoints. In order for these measures to be implemented, government support is important as well as changes in attitude by the public regarding sex workers in general. This requires extensive training in understanding the problem and having sympathy and empathy for the sex workers. Sex workers should also be able to attend health clinics that are welcoming and accepting so that they feel comfortable seeking treatment. The government should inform the sex victims about UNAIDS, a United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, that includes counseling services, testing programs, and treatment facilities for AIDS sufferers. The Thai government should also provide educational programs in helping sex workers to curtail the spread of serious diseases for those suffering with this disease in Thailand. It also provides testing services and treatment facilities.<sup>46</sup> Women infected with HIV/AIDS should be given proper medicines and also career training for alternative jobs so they can leave the sex trade. In Thailand, there are thousands of people living with HIV/AIDS, but many, including migrant populations, are still facing challenges in receiving proper care and antiretroviral therapy. Moreover, education and acceptance in helping sex workers attain proper health care will decrease the spread of serious STDs, like HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B, syphilis, and genital warts. Proper sex education will also help to decrease the number of unwanted pregnancies among sex workers and babies' form to them. Through these provisions, the government can help to improve the working conditions of sex workers. As the next chapter will show, the

Thai government has taken steps to help curb sex trafficking in Thailand through various reform efforts under several Prime Minister.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE REFORM EFFORTS UNDER THE FOUR MAIN THAI PREMIERS FROM 2000-2010

The aim of chapter IV is to examine what efforts were made to combat sex trafficking by four Thai Premiers during the first ten years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It will thus analyze the reform efforts under the leadership of Chuan Leekpai (2000-2001), Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006), Surayud Chulanont (2006-2008), and Abhisit Vejjajiva (2008-2010). This analysis of their leadership is important because they did make efforts to address sex trafficking and pass several laws. However, these laws have not been very effective in significantly curbing the problem of sex trafficking, as Thailand was put on the Tier 2 Watch List twice in the last ten years. The scope of this chapter will cover a ten-year period in Thailand and will focus on reform efforts by these Thai Premiers and their endeavors to combat sex trafficking. The organization is in five parts, with Parts I through IV covering the improvement efforts of each premier and Part V providing an assessment of the extent to which they succeeded.

Although each prime minister made attempts to curb sex trafficking, not enough was done to improve the situation. Not surprisingly, in 2001, when the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report was first published, Thailand was placed on the Tier 2 Level during Chuan Leekpai's second term.<sup>1</sup> Tier 2 level countries are "those whose governments do not fully comply with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act's (TVPA) minimum standards to suppress human trafficking, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards."<sup>2</sup> Thailand was

placed on this level from 2001 to 2003. Unfortunately, under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Thailand slipped down to the Tier 2 Watch List, whereas earlier it had been on the TIP Report's Tier 2 Level. Tier 2 Watch List countries are in a worse position, as they are "countries whose governments do not fully comply with the TVPA's minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards."<sup>3</sup>

Thailand was placed on this List because, despite the high number of sex trafficking cases in the country, the majority of them go unreported by law enforcement officials. Thailand has also been placed on this List because it has failed to give support that it is improving its efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking. The country has, however, not been placed on the Tier 3 List because it is making efforts to comply with minimum standards and has agreed to take additional steps to combat sex trafficking. Tier 3 countries are "those, which do not comply with the minimum standards and are not making any efforts to curb human trafficking."<sup>4</sup> Over the last ten years, Thailand has fallen down to the Tier Two Watch List twice, demonstrating that despite attempts under these four premiers, Thailand has not shown satisfactory improvements in curbing sex trafficking, and the situation in the country is only becoming worse.

### ***Reform Efforts of Chuan Leekpai (2000-2001)***

Chuan Leekpai was born in Trang Province, a southern area of Thailand, on July 28, 1938.<sup>5</sup> He studied Law at Thammasat University in Bangkok and became a member of the Thai Bar Association in 1964.<sup>6</sup> He first worked as a lawyer and then as

a politician. He entered Thai politics in 1969 when he became a Member of Parliament.<sup>7</sup> In 1975 he was made Deputy Ministry of Justice at the age of thirty-seven, and for over a decade Chuan held many positions in the government such as in the Ministry of Agriculture (1982-1983) and the Ministry of Public Health (1988-1989).<sup>8</sup> As a civilian leader he was elected prime minister on September 20, 1992, and changed the country's government from military to civilian.<sup>9</sup> He led a coalition party and was known as "Mr. Clean," because he was recognized as being free of corruption. During his first administration, he was preoccupied with dealing with the country's financial situation, promoting rural growth, and lessening government corruption. However, he did take some initiatives to reduce sex trafficking from 1992 to 1995, like announcing a nationwide crackdown on child and forced prostitution and clamping down on government corruption through brothel raids.

Regarding the nationwide crackdown on child and forced prostitution, on November 2, 1992, Chuan told seventy-five governors from various Thai provinces that they needed to pay more attention and take accountability for trafficking cases in their prospective areas, so less women and children would be victimized.<sup>10</sup> He also tried to persuade rural Thai families not to sell their daughters into the sex trade. Although less Thai families sold their daughters, sex trafficking still continued because Burmese women were trafficked into Thailand.<sup>11</sup> As for clamping down on government corruption through brothel raids, Chuan was motivated to do so after seeing a July 1993, *TIME Magazine* cover which depicted a Thai bar girl in Bangkok sitting on the lap of a Western client.<sup>12</sup> This graphic image of a female sex worker in

Thailand portrayed a negative side of the country as a place tourists can visit to purchase sex. But these raids on brothels failed due to the vast government corruption as many policemen tipped off brothel owners in exchange for money. In some cases the brothel owners even allowed the police to engage in sexual activities. Even though records have shown Thai law enforcement's involvement in the sex trade, none of the police officers were charged until a sex worker was murdered in 1992, which linked Thai police to this brutal crime.<sup>13</sup> Most of the time, brothel owners, pimps, and clients escaped punishment and prosecution for sex trafficking crimes. Unfortunately, the ones who were charged were the victims themselves.

His first term ended May 2005 because of a land reform scandal in Phuket involving a member from his Democratic Party. The land reform was supposed to help the poor, but instead it aided the wealthy.<sup>14</sup> He was then replaced by a new premier Banharn Silaparcha, the leader of the Thai Nation Party. Silaparcha's administration took a turn for the worst as Thailand was then suffering from economic discontent and government corruption as a result he lost the 1999 election is former Army Commander General Chavalit.<sup>15</sup> But Chavalit's administration was severely affected by the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis that led the stock market to crash and the Thai Baht to lose half its value.<sup>16</sup> This disaster forced Thailand to approach the International Monetary Fund for loans to bail the country out of debt.<sup>17</sup> Because of the economic chaos, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh resigned amidst growing criticism due to the dismal economic conditions in Thailand.

On November 9, 1997, during the Asian Financial Crisis, Chuan Leekpai was elected premier for the second time.<sup>18</sup> This 1997 crisis left women and children seeking work wherever they could find it, making them more vulnerable than ever to prostitution and sex trafficking gangs. In Chuan's second term, his administration signed six main laws and initiatives in order to take a stronger stance on curbing the sex trafficking problem. First, he signed the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking of Women and Children Act B.E. 2540 on November 17, 1997.<sup>19</sup> Under this Act, women and children under the age of eighteen can be considered victims of trafficking and harsher punishments would be issued to traffickers who try to force them into the sex trade.<sup>20</sup> Second, he put into effect on November 17, 1997 an important law, the Penal Code Amendment Act (No. 14) BE 2540.<sup>21</sup> This law included punishment for traffickers who specifically attempted to coerce and entice women and children into the sex industry.<sup>22</sup> Both these laws were effective in bringing more attention to the criminal activities involved in sex trafficking, whereas previous laws only addressed prostitution and not the act of forcing women and children into the sex trade. However, there were still several loopholes in these laws since many traffickers received little to no punishment for their actions and the government corruption in Thailand was not fully addressed.

Third, Chuan founded the Center for Protection of Children and Women in the Royal Thai Police in 1998.<sup>23</sup> This center was aimed at helping sexually abused women, by educating the Thai Police about the issues of sex trafficking so that they would apply a more humanitarian approach for assisting victims. This program was effective

because it pushed the Thai police to start aiding sex trafficking victims. An example of this was evident when in April 18, 2000, Thai police and a member of the Center for Protection of Children Rights Foundations saved two Laotian girls in Thailand, ages thirteen and sixteen, from a house where the girls were allegedly being prepped to work in the sex industry.<sup>24</sup>

The fourth measure by Chuan against sex trafficking was in June 1999, when his administration signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the Common Guidelines for Agencies Concerned with Cases where Women and Children are Victims of Human Trafficking.<sup>25</sup> The main reason for this MOU was to develop strategies for government agencies to use to protect the human rights of trafficking victims, including immigrants.<sup>26</sup> Previously, the government regarded all non-Thais as illegal migrants. The MOU prompted procedures for the government to offer assistance for victims of sex trafficking, including shelters for them to live in and assistance to go back to their country of origin.

Chuan's fifth step against sex trafficking in Thailand involved the adoption of several education programs aimed at girls staying in school longer. The first was the National Education Act in 1999, which lengthened their mandatory years in school from six years to nine years.<sup>27</sup> Under this Act, women were to receive career and vocational training. These steps were effective because the number of educational programs in Thailand had increased and there were now over twenty-two educational programs offering underprivileged women more career opportunities as a means to stay away from the sex trade.<sup>28</sup> Some educational programs were still criticized for

emphasizing conventional female roles, like sewing and cooking, which normally would not lead to a higher paying job. This further demonstrates that even with career training, women still do not receive equal treatment as men. The educational and employment initiatives have failed, however, to extend these rights to migrant women. Women in the hill tribes in the north, like the Hmong and the Karen, do not receive equal education opportunities like Thai nationals.<sup>29</sup> This issue affects hundreds of thousands of women living in Thailand.<sup>30</sup> These same women are more liable to become victims of trafficking because as noncitizens they cannot receive the same educational and employment opportunities as citizens. If they ever decide to leave Thailand or if they are trafficked to another country, they can never return to Thailand because the government will not let them re-enter the country. Often they will have to remain in the country they are trafficked to and may never see their family again.

Chuan's sixth measure to curb sex trafficking took place when he signed the UN's TIP Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children in 2001.<sup>31</sup> This was an international agreement, which provided penalties for traffickers and urged international governments to introduce national legislation against sex trafficking.<sup>32</sup> Although it has been signed, the Thai government has still not ratified this protocol as of 2010. After ten years, this shows a serious lack of concern for the sex trafficking problem in Thailand. Prime Minister Chan Leekpai served in office from September 1992 to May 1995 and from November 1997 to February 2001 and became the longest serving elected civilian prime minister.<sup>33</sup> However, he was criticized for the dismal economic conditions in Thailand and the

Thai people wanted a change in leadership. As a result he was, defeated in the 2001 elections by the charismatic Thaksin Shinawatra, a then very successful entrepreneur.

### ***Reform Efforts of Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006)***

Thaksin Shinawatra was born into a wealthy Chinese-Thai family in the northern province of Chiang Mai on July 26, 1949.<sup>34</sup> At the age of fifteen, he attended one of Chiang Mai's most elite private schools, Mongfort College.<sup>35</sup> He then entered to the Thai Police Cadet Academy and in 1973, graduated from the Royal Thai Police Department.<sup>36</sup> Less than a year later, he left for Sam Houston State University in Texas on a police scholarship, where he earned a doctorate in criminology.<sup>37</sup> In 1982, he worked as a successful entrepreneur and within five years he amassed a multi-billion dollar fortune through telecommunications ventures, which included Thailand's largest mobile phone service provider.<sup>38</sup>

Thaksin Shinawatra first entered politics in the early 1990s, when he served briefly as foreign minister in the reformist group *Palang Tham* also known as the Moral Force Party.<sup>39</sup> In 1997, he served as deputy Prime Minister during Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's administration during the Asian Financial Crisis.<sup>40</sup> He was elected as the twenty-third Prime Minister of Thailand in 2001 and was reelected in 2005 after a landslide victory. He was the first Prime Minister to serve a full term in office. During his first term, Prime Minister Thaksin was already preoccupied with other important issues that needed to be addressed. Some of the other issues he was dealing with were effects of the Asian Financial Crisis, Thailand's War on Drugs, the Muslim insurgency in Southern Thailand, and supporting the US-

led War on Terrorism. Nevertheless, he took measures to lessen the sex trafficking problem in Thailand during his first term and he created five main goals used to help lessen the sex trafficking problem in Thailand.

His first measure against sex trafficking was the National Plan and Policy of Prevention and Resolution of Domestic Cross-Border Trafficking in Children and Women (2003-2008), which had three important Memorandums of Understanding geared towards getting other governments and NGOs to work together in helping victims of sexual exploitation.<sup>41</sup> These were the MOU on Common Operational Guidelines for Government Agencies Engaged in Addressing Trafficking in Children and Women (2003), the MOU on Operations Between State Agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations Engaged in Addressing Trafficking in Children and Women (2003), and the MOU between the Government of Thailand and the Government of Cambodia on Bilateral Cooperation for Eliminating Trafficking in Children and Women and Assisting Victims of Trafficking (2003).<sup>42</sup> These agreements sought to strengthen the support between international government agencies and NGOs in helping in the protection and return of migrant sex workers to their country.

Thaksin's second preventive measure to protect sex trafficking victims was the establishment of the Witness Protection Act in 2003.<sup>43</sup> Under this Act, victims are able to receive a paycheck for living expenses for twelve months, a new identity, occupational training, and access to education and bodyguard protection. The family members of trafficking victims can also receive protection under this Act. Moreover, those who threaten or try to harm sex trafficking victims may face a jail time of one to

three years or be fined 20,000 to 60,000 baht (around \$600-\$1,900 U.S. dollars).<sup>44</sup>The full extent of this law, though, does not apply to illegal immigrants.<sup>45</sup>

All these initiative were not enough, however, since on June 2004, the U.S. Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report put Thailand under the Tier 2 Watch List, whereas in previous years it had been placed on Tier Two.<sup>46</sup> This drop in level meant that Thailand was making an effort to address human trafficking but still did not conform to the minimum standards of reducing sex trafficking. The TIP Report's negative assessment on Thailand led to the prime minister's third initiative.

Thaksin's third initiative to curb sex trafficking was to make the issue of sex trafficking of national importance to Thailand. Accordingly, he created multiple courses of action to protect trafficking victims. For instance, he declared, "victims must not be treated as offenders."<sup>47</sup> He also introduced new methods, such as the prevention, rescue, protection, and reintegration of victims. In addition he had new law enforcement and cooperation procedures including procedures for the victims' return and rehabilitation into society.<sup>48</sup> As a result of the 2004 TIP Report, Thaksin also increased government training on sex trafficking related issues and had more information campaigns to increase public awareness about sex trafficking.<sup>49</sup> This included the circulation of pamphlets and the setting up of telephone hotlines for reporting all alleged trafficking incidents. The government also encouraged the work of NGOs and other international organizations to create public awareness campaigns and offer support services to victims.

Although new agreements with neighboring countries were signed, Prime

Minister Thaksin Shinawatra neglected human rights assistance towards Burmese refugees in order to maintain a stronger relationship with the Myanmar government. Many Burmese face constant violence and persecution in Myanmar where the minority groups are refused rights that citizens enjoy. Burmese migrants in Thailand are also facing harsh discrimination from the Thai Government. The Thai government even forced the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to move Burmese refugees living in Bangkok and other cities to small little camps along the Thai-Burma border.<sup>50</sup> For refugees who refuse to do so, the Thai government has threatened to cut off economic aid and end the renewal of protection certificates. Traffickers will kidnap many of these female Burmese migrants, and with little options left and fear of returning home to their country, many of these women will enter into prostitution since the Thai government rejects applications from the Burmese exiles fleeing oppression for their pro-democracy activities in Myanmar.

During his second term in 2005, Prime Minister Thaksin's fourth step against sex trafficking was setting up a grant of 500 million baht (about \$13 million U.S. dollars) to help fund help initiatives for trafficking victims.<sup>51</sup> Since the 2005 grant to aid victims of human trafficking, only 100 million baht (a little over 3 million U.S. dollars) has been spent for human trafficking.<sup>52</sup> A fifth step in curbing sex trafficking occurred in July 2005 when the Thai government signed a Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of Thailand and the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on Cooperation to Combat Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.<sup>53</sup> This agreement was aimed at suppressing the

exploitation of women and children and to stop organized crimes involved in sex trafficking.

After more than five years in power, Thaksin was ousted from his role as prime minister in a military coup in 2006 after he was accused of abuse of power and political corruption. The government overthrew him while he was in the United States for a United Nations General Assembly meeting. The Thai military entered Bangkok and took control of the government buildings and media on 19 September 2006.<sup>54</sup> This was a bloodless coup led by the Thai military leader General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, the first Muslim to head the Thai army. The new military-led government repealed the then constitution, dissolved parliament, declared martial law, and appointed General Surayud Chulanont as the new Prime Minister.

### *Reform Efforts of Surayud Chulanont (2006-2008)*

Surayud Chulanont was born on August 28, 1943, into a military family in Phetchaburi, a central province of Thailand.<sup>55</sup> His father was a senior officer who grew so dissatisfied with the Royal Thai Army that he defected and joined the Communist Party of Thailand when Surayud was only a child.<sup>56</sup> He was raised in Bangkok and attended a number of military institutions, like the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy and the Infantry Center School Joint Staff College.<sup>57</sup> Despite his father's actions, he joined the army and fought against Thai communist guerillas in the 1960s.<sup>58</sup> In 1992, he commanded Bloody May, a violent government attack which killed over fifty protestors, although he denied that he ever gave the command to hurt these activists.<sup>59</sup> In 1997, he fought against human rights abuses and let the Burmese

refugees flee to Thailand to escape the oppression in their country.<sup>60</sup> His actions clashed with those of Thaksin Shinawatra as Thaksin sided with Myanmar's government in 1999 against the refugees.<sup>61</sup> In 2003, Surayud left the Thai army and became a monk, but was eventually appointed advisor to the king. Surayud played a role in promoting General Sonthi Boonratklin to become an army commander. In 2006, Commander Boonratklin led a coup that overthrew Thaksin. After Thaksin's ouster, he requested that Surayud become the new premier.<sup>62</sup>

During his administration, Surayud pursued six main initiatives against sex trafficking. His first initiative was getting neighboring countries from the Greater Mekong Sub-region like Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, China, and Thailand to work together to discuss border issues and to cooperate in anti-trafficking measures.<sup>63</sup>

His efforts were helped by, Vital Voices Global Partnership, which in May 2006 helped to encourage human rights, economic empowerment, and leadership roles for women. It agreed to work with Thailand's government in the fight to combat sex trafficking.<sup>64</sup> In Bangkok, Vital Voices hosted a local conference entitled, "Thailand to Encourage Civil Society and Government Efforts to Collaborate in the Prevention and Elimination of Human Trafficking."<sup>65</sup> During this meeting, government and nongovernment organizations from other countries came together to discuss common problems.

His second initiative was to give citizenship rights to migrants, which would help the females among them to avoid the sex trade since legally they would be able to work in Thailand. Unlike Thaksin's severe anti-Burmese policies, Surayud declared

that human rights for Burmese refugees would be his biggest priority.<sup>66</sup> These refugees are mainly from the Karen and Shan hill tribes. Under him, over 140,000 refugees were given identity cards to work legally in Thailand.<sup>67</sup>

His third initiative, in May 2007, was the establishment of a Center Against International Human Trafficking (CAHT).<sup>68</sup> This Center had attorneys to take legal action against sex traffickers. From 2005 to 2007, there were 44 cases prosecuted by the Center.<sup>69</sup> In 2007, two Thai traffickers were each sentenced to seven years in prison for their involvement in the trafficking of a fifteen-year-old girl to Singapore for the sex trade.<sup>70</sup> However, more should be done by this Center to fight the sex trade.

Surayud's fourth initiative was the passing of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E 2551 in 2008.<sup>71</sup> This Act took steps to address trafficking not only for the purpose of sexual exploitation, but also for labor trafficking. It applied not only to women and children, but adult males. Moreover, it imposed stricter punishments on all found guilty of criminal activity in connection with the sex trade. The Act enabled victims to receive financial payment, shelter, education, legal aid, and healthcare. Previously, anti-trafficking legislation only dealt with sexual trafficking and not labor trafficking.

The fifth initiative under Surayud was public awareness activities on sex trafficking and on sex tourism geared mainly towards limiting child prostitution. Hence, pamphlets were handed out in well-known tourist locations like Koh, Pattaya, Samui, Chiang Mai, and Phuket.<sup>72</sup> There were harsh penalties for those accused of trying to pay for child prostitutes.<sup>73</sup> In addition, "public dialogues" on trafficking and

television advertisements helped to create more public awareness on the problem of child prostitution. Sadly, the Thai government only reported a small amount of police raids.

Surayud's sixth initiative to curtail sex trafficking was more training for Thai police officers. The Thai government and NGOs offered training to police officers, prosecutors, social workers, and immigration officers on the 2008 Anti-Trafficking Act.<sup>74</sup> This Law forbids sex and labor trafficking and imposes a jail sentence of four to ten years for those accused of sex trafficking crimes. The punishments are stricter for more serious misdemeanors, like rape. As of 2008, over 250,000 government officials had been trained to identify victims of human trafficking.<sup>75</sup> The police also established the Transnational Crime Coordination Center, which gathers and examines trafficking information and carries out strategic planning for anti-trafficking work. Trafficking victims, both Thais and non-Thais are still given shelter and protection. The non-Thai victims however, are not allowed to leave shelters unsupervised. Unfortunately, these women are not allowed to seek work outside of their shelters.

### ***Reform Efforts of Abhisit Vejjajiva (2008-2010)***

Abhisit Vejjajiva was born in Newcastle, England, in 1964 to an upper-class family, and he attended one of England's most renowned public schools, Eton.<sup>76</sup> He earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy, economics, and politics at Oxford University. He also earned his Master's degree in economics from Oxford. He taught economics at Thammasat University in Bangkok and even earned a bachelor's degree in 1990 from Ramakhamheang University in Bangkok. He was elected to Thailand's

Parliament at the age of twenty-seven in 1992.<sup>77</sup> In 2005 he became the Democrat Party leader, but he failed to win the premiership in the national elections in 2007. Somchai Wongsawat won this election, but only served as premier for four months before the Constitutional Court found Wongsawat's party guilty of electoral fraud. In any cases, the election was followed by months of political turmoil, including the closure of two of Bangkok's airports, which devastated the tourist industry. He was then appointed premier in December 17, 2008.<sup>78</sup> During his administration, Abhisit had to deal with rising political disorder and another financial crisis.

In Abhisit Vejjajiva's term there was continued public awareness-raising activities and law enforcement training on sex trafficking. Regarding anti-sex trafficking initiatives, he is known for his three measures. His first anti-trafficking prevention was to raise public awareness by working with NGOs and other international organizations to curb human trafficking amongst tourist populations. His campaign was aimed at targeting tourist demand for sex tourism especially numerous international pedophiles seeking child prostitution. His initiatives however failed in that thousands of people still come to Thailand and seek out child prostitution.

His second measure in 2009 was an MOU. The Thai and Burmese law enforcement officials signed a MOU between the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand and the Government of the Union of Myanmar on Cooperation to Combat Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.<sup>79</sup> This agreement was enacted so that the government of Myanmar and Thailand would work together to fight this evil.<sup>80</sup> Although the government tried to work with other countries, the Thai

government failed to persuade migrant sex trafficking victims to participate in the investigations of their trafficking case. For instance, there was no evidence in 2010 that suggested that law enforcement officials encouraged trafficking victims to help in the prosecution of traffickers' cases for sex trafficking.<sup>81</sup> In fact, factors such as legal fees, financial struggles, language barriers, fear of reprisal from traffickers, immigration laws, and distrust of Thai law enforcement have caused many sex trafficking victims not speak up during trafficking prosecution cases. More than half of the trafficking victims in 2010 were from Laos, while a quarter was from Burma.<sup>82</sup> Thailand continues to work with Lao and Burmese law enforcement in dealing with trafficking issues. In 2010, there were 88 Thai nationals trafficked overseas who were finally repatriated back to Thailand with help from other countries. This repatriation was done with the help of these countries such as South Africa, China, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Sri Lanka, Bahrain, Russia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Yemen, the UK, Singapore, and the United States.<sup>83</sup> The government also made efforts to recognize victims of trafficking among at-risk populations by screening checkpoints at border crossings and airports. His government worked on legislation to permit migrant trafficking victims to temporarily live and work in Thailand. Many trafficking victims are confined to these government shelters and were not authorized to seek other careers because they are not Thai citizens.<sup>84</sup> Under Abhisit Thailand continued to carry out investigations of female passport applicants from ages 14-36 years old and denied passports or the ability to travel abroad legally to those who authorities believed may be "procured to sexual businesses in other countries."<sup>85</sup>

Abhisit's third measure against sex trafficking was the enactment of Thailand's second Six-Year National Policy Strategy on Human Trafficking.<sup>86</sup> This strategy was to cover 2011 to 2016. This policy was drafted in 2010 and implemented in 2011. It resulted from Abhisit publically admitting the need to increase anti-trafficking measures among government agencies; however he was forced to leave office before the full effect of this legislation could be measured.

Despite his efforts, Thailand was placed on the Tier 2 Watch List again in 2010 because the Thai government did not make sufficient efforts to identify trafficking victims even though there were numerous cases of sexual exploitation in the country. There have also been a small number of arrests made in Abhisit's term. For instance, there were 134 trafficking cases reported from June 2008 to November 2009, and Thai police could not give any details on these the cases to the United States TIP Report.<sup>87</sup> The punishment for trafficking crimes remains very light with little to no jail time for the traffickers, except in the case of murder. On the whole, many traffickers are still released shortly after being arrested.

### ***Conclusion***

The problem of female sex trafficking is still very pervasive and, in fact, has become worse over the last ten years. The problem is extremely complex and complicated. It continues to thrive because of the country's widespread government corruption, which operates on so many levels, from the low-level police, to the border control officers, to the judges, and even to the high-level government officials. All of them have been known to accept bribes and incentives from traffickers, thus

facilitating the sex trade. Besides government corruption, another very important reason for female sex trafficking is the extreme poverty in the country. This poverty has driven some Thai families to sell their female members to the sex trade for money or to obtain loans. It has also led the crime syndicates to prey on vulnerable women.

This chapter deals with the efforts of four Thai Premiers to combat female sex trafficking. Their efforts were carried out under difficult circumstances, as each had to handle other problems in Thailand, such as political turmoil, economic crisis, and ethnic and religious tensions. Chuan Leekpai, for instance, had to deal with the Asian Financial Crisis, the curbing of government corruption, and the promotion of economic growth in poverty-stricken areas in Thailand. Thaksin Shinawatra had to deal with the Asian Financial Crisis, the violent Muslim insurgency in the South, the US-led War on Terrorism, the War on Drugs, and illegal immigrant from Myanmar. In the case of Surayud Chulanont's administration, it was fraught with violent anti-government protest, rising government corruption, and the Burmese refugee problem. Many of the Burmese women were even willing to prostitute themselves in Thailand because they were in such desperate need of income to survive. Abhisit Vejjajiva's government was troubled with yet another financial crisis, with growing Muslim insurgency in the South, and with problems from Thaksin's supporters.

However, of the four former Thai Premiers, Chuan Leekpai did the most for combating female sex trafficking by taking six steps to deal with the problem. He did so by signing the Prevention and Suppression Act of Trafficking of Women and Children, which was the first law to fully address protecting victims of sex trafficking

and punishing those who try to force women and children for sexual exploitation. His second important law was the Penal Code Amendment Act (No. 14) BE 2540 (1997), which included harsher punishments for traffickers. Both laws were effective in bringing more attention to the criminal activities involved with the sex trafficking of women and children, while earlier laws only addressed prostitution and had made no mention of forced sex trafficking. Most importantly, he tried to improve education for women by keeping young girls in school longer. This was perhaps one of the most vital initiatives because better education opportunities for women will lead to greater career openings and to higher paying jobs, making them less likely to succumb to sex trafficking.

Surayud Chulanont is second to Chuan in implementing greater anti-trafficking measures as he continued Chuan's work in this area. His administration drafted one of the most important laws, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2008, which filled in the gaps in Chuan's 1997 anti-trafficking Act. The 2008 Law called for stricter penalties on all sex trafficking offenders and it gave victims the chance to claim payment from the traffickers for emotional and physical damages in the sex trade. Unlike the 1997 Act, the 2008 Act addressed men and women and covered all forms of trafficking like forced labor and sex trafficking. He also attempted to help Burmese migrants, unlike Thaksin, by offering them the chance to seek work unrelated to the sex industry. In addition to help female victims of sex trafficking, he established shelters, counseling centers, legal bureaus, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities for them.

Thaksin Shinawatra is third when it comes carrying out attempts to curb sex trafficking. He signed a series of MOUs with other countries and promoted international cooperation in the fight against the sex trade. He established the Witness Protection Act and set up funds to aid victims of sex trafficking. However, it was not until Thailand was placed on the Tier 2 Watch List in 2004 that Thaksin's attempted to fight sex trafficking by making it a problem of national importance. Despite his efforts, he was unable to improve Thailand's standing in the TIP Report. His was administration was too preoccupied with the September 11, 2001 developments in Thailand, especially the al-Qaeda links with the Muslims in the South, and with fighting the War on Drugs.

Abhisit Vejjajiva is placed forth for his efforts to curb female sex trafficking because his administration only developed three measures to curb female sex trafficking. The most important of these three was the MOU Between the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand and the Government of the Union of Myanmar on Cooperation to Combat Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Unfortunately despite his efforts during his last year in office, in 2010, Thailand was placed on the TIP Report's Tier 2 Watch List for the second time.

Even though female sex trafficking and its evils exist in Thailand, the efforts to fight it must continue. In fact, this means that the Thai government should reexamine its efforts and to thrive to strengthen their initiatives to combat this heinous crime. As the next chapter will show, stronger leadership, to eradicate poverty, to provide more training and education facilities, and to fight corruption is needed to help diminish the

number of sex trafficking cases. Chapter V will, therefore, suggest some recommendations to help alleviate the female sex trafficking problem in Thailand. The last chapters will also discuss prospects for the future with regard to the female sex trade.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALLEVIATING THE FEMALE SEX TRADE IN THAILAND AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE**

The goal of Chapter V is to review the problem of sexual exploitation in Thailand and to offer recommendations that the Thai government can take into consideration to help curb sex trafficking. The scope covers the last ten years of the female sex trade in that country from 2000-2010. The organization of this chapter is in five parts. Part I, the “Review of the Sex Trade in Thailand,” will provide a summary to show that sex trafficking in this country is an extremely complex problem. Part II, the “Political Recommendations for Combating the Sex Trade,” will offer recommendations to curb corruption; strengthen weak governance in Thailand’s law enforcement and court system; and providing human rights for migrant workers. Part III, the “Economic Recommendations for Curbing Sex Trafficking,” will suggest some on poverty, especially in the North; increasing career training; and opening up more job opportunities for women. Part IV, the “Socio-Cultural Recommendations for Alleviating the Sex Trade,” will give recommendations on offering more education for women, the removal of religious and cultural biases towards them, and the use of mass media to promote much needed changes in Thailand to help sex workers. Part V, “Prospects for the Future,” will discuss the important factors that will determine whether or not the sex trafficking of women will be curbed in the near future.

### *Review of the Sex Trade in Thailand, 2000 – 2010*

Sex trafficking is an extremely complicated problem to curtail, especially in Thailand. It is difficult to restrict because of the complex political, economic, and socio-cultural reasons behind the sex trade. The political problems causing the sex trade to thrive in Thailand are as follows: corruption, weak governance in Thailand's law enforcement and court system, and human rights abuses regarding migrant sex workers. As for the economic causes, the main reasons are the widespread poverty, particularly in the rural areas; the lack of job training; and insufficient career opportunities for women. In the case of the socio-cultural causes, these revolve around underprovided educational opportunities for women, religious biases based on Theravada Buddhism; and cultural biases based on gender inequality. To reduce these political, economic and socio-cultural causes of female sex trafficking in Thailand, education will play a pivotal role because it will help curb all these problems.

At present, female sex trafficking in Thailand is going through what is known as a "Push-down, Pop-up Effect."<sup>1</sup> This has occurred in Thailand in two ways. One way is that while sex trafficking has been curbed in certain areas, the problem continues to pop-up in other regions of Thailand, such as in the impoverished North. The second way is that although the government has reduced sex trafficking among Thai women, sex traffickers have replaced these women with foreign women, like those from the neighboring countries of China, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos.<sup>2</sup>

### *Political Recommendations for Combating Sex Trafficking*

The recommendations on the political level will revolve around four issues: the government corruption; the weak law enforcement; the ineffective court system; and the insufficient human rights for migrants. In terms of corruption within the government, four recommendations are proposed. First, the Thai government must offer its workers, low-level and high-level better salaries so that they are less susceptible to bribery. For instance, government officials are paid low salaries and are, therefore, more likely to be tempted by money from traffickers. The second recommendation is to impose harsher punishments against government workers who break the law with regard to the sex trade. Government officials found guilty of involvement in the sex trade and those failing to enforce anti-sex trafficking measures should be penalized to the fullest degree in court. For example, they should be fined, relieved of their jobs, and even given an adequate jail sentence. Given the scope of the crime, capital punishment should also be used in extreme cases involving murder of a sex worker. Presently, many law enforcement officials have walked away with little or no punishment. The third recommendation is to have a stronger system of checks and balances within the Thai government as presently there is much miscommunication as well as lack of cooperation between the different levels of government, such as the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Labor, and the Immigration Department. With a more organized system of checks and balances, this will help ensure that no one level will become too powerful or corrupt as each level of government will keep a watchful

eye on the other. With checks and balances, all the different levels of government will work better together and will limit each other's powers.

The first recommendation in dealing with weak law enforcement in Thailand is that the Thai police must receive more adequate training on understanding the specific laws on sex trafficking. For instance, they should be very clear on the definition of sex trafficking; on identifying a sex victim; and understanding laws pertaining to sex trafficking. They should also know how to handle sex trafficking cases and how to treat female sex victims. Presently, many Thai police do not understand the laws fully, are accepting bribes, and are involved with some of the sex trafficking victims. A second recommendation is that there needs to be stronger and more effective border and immigration control with regard to illegal female migrants recruited for the sex trade.

As for improving the ineffective judiciary system, there are two recommendations. The first recommendation is that the Thai court system should prosecute a far larger number of sex trafficking cases than given the numerous victims in the Thai sex industry. So far, only a few cases of sex trafficking end up in court and when they do, the traffickers get off very lightly. Usually the sex trafficking victims are the ones who are punished. The second recommendation for the ineffective court system is that they should have stricter punishments for sex traffickers. At present, the average sentence for convicted traffickers is usually no more than three years with little to no fines. The courts typically convict around thirty to forty traffickers a year despite the thousands of trafficking victims throughout Thailand.<sup>3</sup>

In connection with the human rights abuses suffered by for female migrant workers, there are three recommendations. The first recommendation is better training for law enforcement officials to overcome language barriers and to understand their ethnic differences when dealing with migrant female workers. By removing these barriers, there will be less mistrust between migrant women and Thai law enforcement. The second recommendation is that the Thai government should provide some education to migrant workers so that they can have an understanding of their human rights, such as those pertaining to shelter, food, and legal protection. The Thai government must also work to educate these workers about the dangers of sex trafficking. For example, Matt Friedman, Regional Project Manager of United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking in Thailand was told by a migrant sex victim, “you know I had no idea, I really thought I could get around this and I couldn’t because these people [sex traffickers] are so smart and clever and they tell me everything I need to hear.”<sup>4</sup>

#### *Economic Recommendations for Curbing Sex Trafficking*

The economic recommendations will deal with three main issues; the extreme poverty, especially in Northern Thailand; the lack of career training for women, and the insufficient and very low paying jobs. Regarding poverty, the government must develop rural areas in the North, into more urban environments. This applies especially to Northern Thailand where the poverty rate is the highest. In connection with this recommendation, the government should start building schools so the poor can receive a better education, which can lead to better paying jobs. The government also needs to

build more hospitals so the poor can have places to go to for medical treatment. In addition, the Thai government should also develop more housing projects for at-risk populations so rural families have a place to live while earn money by working, and can obtain an education.

The second recommend deals with the lack of career training. The government should provide adequate career training to prevent women from remaining in low paying occupations because they do not have the skills for higher paying professional jobs. This training will be beneficial during times of economic turmoil as the better training will help to keep their jobs. Those women with more career training will have better chances for promotions and furthering their careers. One area that can prove useful for women is information technology. Microsoft for example, has given \$1.5 million dollars to fund software for NGO's in the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, India, and Thailand to train women in information technology positions who are at risk of being trafficked.<sup>5</sup>

The third economic recommendation is that Thailand must also offer women a wider variety of job opportunities. Instead of only training a female to become a seamstress, a hair stylist, and a waitress, it time the Thai government aimed higher - for them to provide better job openings that come with higher paying salaries. The government should aim to provide jobs in the following fields: computer technology, medical sciences, and entrepreneurial jobs that will help to place them in leadership roles leading to brighter futures.<sup>6</sup> Expanding on these types of employment prospects for women in non-traditional female jobs will also help bridge the gap between gender

inequalities. Businesses in Thailand should thus implement affirmative action policies regarding women in the workplace in order to guarantee that women receive the same equal job opportunities as men. With more career opportunities for Thai women, they will be less vulnerable to sex traffickers who only prey on them.

### ***Socio-Cultural Recommendations for Alleviating the Sex Trade***

In the case of the socio-cultural causes, the government must address the lower status of women, gender inequality, and religious and cultural prejudice towards females in Thailand. The government can speak to all these socio-cultural issues by addressing the need for better educational opportunities for women. The government should also use the media to help generate a more positive view of women and educate the public on the horrors of sex trafficking.

The government should continue to make sure young girls stay in school until they complete their secondary education. Better education improves the status of women by encouraging them to become stronger female leaders and role models for the future. The Office of the National Commission of Women's Affairs in Thailand has been sponsoring a number of programs aimed at drawing women away from the sex industry.<sup>7</sup> They issue scholarships to young girls in hopes that they will remain in school until they are eighteen. The project, Education Means Protection of Women Engaged in Recreation, otherwise known as EMPOWER, was created to decrease the animosity against sex workers and provide educational opportunities, health care services, career training, and counseling to those who have escaped sex trafficking.<sup>8</sup>

Education will also help to eliminate gender inequality by offering women the same skills and jobs opportunities as men. Men traditionally have better paying jobs and usually receive higher paying salaries. These skills and education are needed so women can obtain better careers that normally go men like engineering, law, and the sciences. The Thai government can even help to bridge the gap by giving females more management positions. In terms of bridging the gender gap with Thailand's youth, the government can harness the power of the media to educate men and women about the horrific conditions women face in the sex industry through television, radio, newspapers, and other communication modes to help create awareness and combat sex trafficking.

In changing the cultural and the religious biases of women, the Thai government must educate parents about the dangers of the sex trade. This would help remove the traditional of debt bondage and selling daughters into the sex trade. The government can also educate parents about the importance of having a daughter and that everyday commodities like electronics should not equal the life of their offspring and that women are just as valuable as men.

With relation to the power of mass media, the government can use its messages to portray a positive image of women and to change society complacent view on sex trafficking.<sup>9</sup> The government can also work with media outlets to provide helpful anti-trafficking helplines and information for victims and community members who may want to get involved. More media coverage will also shed light on the criminals who are the sex trafficker. The Thai government can work with journalists to shed light on

the dark operations of the sex trade and bring much needed attention to the suffering of female sex workers. Many of the stories feature female victims who have survived the sex trade. These women's stories can help educate others to become a valued member of society, which can help to inspire other female sex workers to escape the sex trade. These stories can even cause governments to initiate tougher reform measures against sex trafficking.

One example of the media taking a stand in the fight against sex trafficking is with the *CNN Freedom Project*. This is an initiative aimed at helping organizations around the world fight human trafficking by bringing the stories of the victims to light. The *CNN Freedom Project* is broadcasted in more than 200 countries around the world, including Thailand, and it reaches more than 260 million homes across the globe. The Thai government should work with international journalists, like those in the Freedom Project to expose trafficking crimes in the country. In one example, their correspondent, Dan Rivers, investigated a slave ring in Northern Thailand that was run by a monk. Without the involvement of media, the leader of the ring would not have been expelled from the clergy. He received a punishment of twenty-one years in prison for trafficking and sexually abusing under-aged children. The government can use media to bring attention to other terrible cases in order to alert the public about the sex trade. Leif Coorlim, the Editorial Director of CNN's Freedom Project believes media plays a pivotal role in curbing the sex trade, though it will take the Thai government's cooperation to really make a difference. To him, "Most countries appear to be taking steps to get a handle on the problem, and as long as there are people and media outlets

paying attention and pushing for increased efforts, things should get better, however slowly.”<sup>10</sup>

Other television programs, such as *MTV's End Exploitation and Trafficking (EXIT)* documentary initiative, are broadcasted on the local Thai channels featuring music videos or interviews aimed at raising awareness on the problem of trafficking. But many times the messages are too short and the full impact of sex trafficking has not been fully illustrated in these videos. The documentaries have captured the gloom of Thailand's sex trade, but it's important to create more public service announcements (PSAs), such as public service commercials that advocate literacy for young girls so that they can acquire practical skills that will lead to more valuable jobs and steer them away from the sex trade. The government should work with these media outlets to create longer PSAs that get the message across that sex trafficking is a horrendous issue that needs immediate public attention. It is important for the government to work with media to encourage more awareness about the sex trafficking of women and to educate the public about this terrible issue in hopes that more people will stand up against sexual exploitation.

### ***Prospects for the Future***

Sex trafficking is a horrific worldwide problem that is especially prevalent in Thailand, which remains the sex capital of the world. The sex industry remains evident on the streets, at various night markets, and in businesses throughout the country. While in Thailand, the author of this thesis was talking to one of the locals, praising both the beautiful temples and cultural customs. One local Thai woman then responded

by saying, “Oh you haven’t seen the dark side of Bangkok yet,” indicating that the locals are very aware of Thailand’s booming sex industry. This is why prospects for future will depend on to what extent the political, economic, and socio-cultural causes are curtailed. Due to human nature, it is unlikely that the problem of sex trafficking will be completely eliminated because human beings are weak and because sex trafficking is such a complex issue.

On the whole, there are four variables that will affect prospects for the future regarding the sex trade. The first important variable is strong leadership which can help reduce all problems associated with female trafficking. For example, Thailand needs a premier who is wise, capable, and strong enough to curb corruption, who can better control the county’s borders where sex trafficking most commonly occurs and who can also make sure migrant women receive proper protection from traffickers. The second important variable is the state of the economy because during difficult times poverty will increase and will lead some families to sell their female children to sex traffickers in order to survive. Some other families also allow their daughters to enter the sex trade for a loan which they then must pay back by selling their bodies. For poverty to be reduced, the economic gap between the rich and the poor must be bridged.

Regarding the third important variable, it is the role of education. Education can help women avoid the sex trade because it enables them to acquire skills and to obtain better jobs. Education is also vital to train the law enforcement officials to be better at handling the sex trafficking cases and to treat sex workers more effectively. Education also makes the public more aware of sex trafficking and reduces biases from religious

and cultural sources. The fourth variable is the reduction of crime. For female sex trafficking to be curbed crime organizations such as sex trafficking and drug syndicates must be wiped out. They are also behind the recruitment of female sex workers and the ill-treatment of them. Crime organizations are also behind much of the corruption that exist across all levels of government, such as in the law enforcement agencies, the judicial system, and in the Immigration Department. These four variables will determine prospects for the future of the female sex trade problem in Thailand.

## ENDNOTES

### CHAPTER I

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