



Child Prostitution in Asia

Matthieu Delauney

First of all, I would like to thank the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences who invited me here to speak about what I saw in south east Asia. On February 2015, I **spent three weeks** in Phnom Penh trying to find out how sex trafficking works in Cambodia. Last August I spent four weeks in the city of Manila, **in the Philippines**. I went there **to write about** sexuality in slums and street children. Like all of Southeast Asia these countries are plagued by **the scourge of** child prostitution. Every year, thousands of children are taken **away** from their families and become sex slaves. When I first heard about modern slavery, I assumed that it was an exaggeration. Then I went to Cambodia where I met Sina, a young woman, and I listened to her **story**.

"I lived in a village in Vietnam. I was 11 or 12 years when I **was caught** in a trap. I was kidnapped. A few days later I found myself in a brothel in Phnom Penh. As I did not want to have sex and I was still a virgin, I was locked in a room for several days without light or food. One day, the door opened. Somebody gave me something to drink. I woke up the next morning naked on the bed. My stomach made me suffer horribly, but I had no memory. A man entered the room, I **feel** on my knees and begged him to let me rest a little and treat my genitals. In response, he beat me. I was lying on the bed and the nightmare continued. Twenty clients a day for at least three years. "

After Hell

Sina is a survivor. She told me the **horrendous** story that led her from the Vietnamese paddy **fields** to Phnom Penh's **brothels**. **She owes her salvation to** the AFESIP Association, known worldwide for its fight against child sex trafficking. The Cultural awareness is a huge work for child protection **groups** : **85% of clients of prostitution are locals while 15% are foreigners**. Today, Sina works **relentlessly** for the organization and does not want to hear about marriage.

If the country is less exposed to sexual trafficking as its Thai neighbor, according to figures from UNICEF, in Cambodia, 50 to 70,000 prostitutes are children who sell their bodies in 3000 bars, karaoke **venues**, **massage parlors** and brothels. Social workers **have noticed over the years** that children prostitutes are becoming **younger and younger**. The girls **are** between 10 and 14 years old. **This is** due in part **to** the cult of virginity **among** prostitution consumers. They are willing to pay more for **sexual intercourse** with very young children. **Additionally**, a belief commonly **held** across Asia **is** that **having sex with** a virgin would cure AIDS patients.

A lucrative business

The business of prostitution leads to an intense trafficking of children from ethnic minorities, slums and refugee camps, **according to** a report by ECPAT (End child prostitution, child pornography and trafficking), published in 2008. It is important to remember that sexual exploitation here is due to the laxity of laws, inadequate **law enforcement**, poverty and lack of opportunities for young people. **This** exploitation is **particularly** lucrative, well organized by **criminal groups** that encourage corruption.

In Phnom Penh, it's quite easy to find hot spots of **child sexual exploitation**: shopping centers, streets **that are popular with tourists**, dark places or all along the Mekong River. A pedophile often travels alone and usually **carries** cameras, toys or cakes, to attract street children. On the 'Promenade des Anglais' Phnom Penh Sisowath Quay, **I met** two boys of 11 and 5 years **of age who were selling** small bags of corn kernels to passersby. We were sitting on a sidewalk. **Above** us, a **big sign said** "Clean city, clean resort, clean place". These two brothers were never abused but their mother was never far away. Moreover, they **had a place to stay at a relative's house**.

Western **pedophiles go toward** children who **sleep** on the street. They promise **a huge salary** to these kids in addition **to food and a warm place to sleep**. Among these predators, **the vast majority are** Westerners, but the Khmers **also make up a significant portion of pedophiles**. There is a cultural difference in sex consumption. **There** are more **locals** in massage parlors or karaoke **venues**, while **Westerners** prefer to approach street children.

When will it end?

NGOs work closely with the police, **which has been** showing **increased commitment** in the fight against child prostitution. Corruption is still important in the country, but there is an improvement. In 2008, the government **passed** a law on the **eradication** of human trafficking. The exploitation for sexual and commercial purposes

is the **object of 12 articles out of the total of 30 articles in this law**. It prohibits all forms of trafficking and **punishes** these practices as well as other serious crimes such as rape. **The** Ministry of Education, in cooperation with United Nations agencies and NGOs, decided to increase **the** political awareness among citizens. It is urgent: **people** who fight against child prostitution are unanimous: Pedophiles **repeat** their crimes without feeling too guilty because **they think they are contributing** to economic development of the country **by paying for sex**. **In this context**, sex is a way **for** people in extreme poverty **to make money**. Just before leaving, Chhoeurth, AFESIP's director, gave me a document from the US Department of **State**, which ranks the country in **the** "very sensitive category" on the watch list of **human trafficking**. In Cambodia, the fight against child prostitution has just begun and the battle may be long. And it could be the same in other **countries** in South-east Asia

There is a clear correlation between poverty and prostitution. In **the slums of** Manila, it is becoming increasingly common to reward **oral sex** with a few packs of noodles. In one of thousands of small **shacks**, Christina welcomed me in trousers with leopard patterns. She is 28 years old and **has been a** prostitute for 7 years. She became a sex slave to support her two sons and her sister. I had to do my interview quickly because someone had to pick her up to ships **stationed** not far away with about 40 young ladies from **the** Baseco slum. They spend 48 hours on board, with a customer who will pay 60 dollars, about 5000 pesos. **Christina** gives 800 pesos to the **captain** of the boat **and uses the rest** to support her children and family.

Gestational Surrogacy

Finally, I'd like to talk a little about gestational surrogacy. **Couples who cannot have babies suffer tremendously, but** it is my responsibility to speak about what's happening today in Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar or **the** Philippines. I may shock the audience but **over** there, GS could be considered as human slavery.

While the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) condemned France for refusing to transcribe into civil registers the birth certificates of children born abroad via GS (gestational surrogacy), hundreds of young Asian girls pay a price with their dignity for the right of certain couples to become parents.

Gammy is a baby affected by down syndrome who became **famous** last year when the world discovered his story. It's all about the money. His mother Goy is a **Thai** young lady who carried Goy and his sister for adoptive parents from Australia. When they discovered that Gammy **might** have **down** syndrome, they asked the mother **to get an abortion**. Because of her religion, **Buddhism**, Goy refused and the Australian couple decided to **stop** their help and finally took only the sister. Today Gammy and Goy are living in Bangkok. This case exposed the practices **around** GS in Thailand and forced Thai lawmakers to take a stand.

The story of baby Gammy revealed the intrinsic mercantile dimension in the practice. The market links a surrogate mother **to** the GS sponsors while the child is a product and each parties' goal is financial gain. It is **obvious for** the surrogate mother who is almost always in a delicate financial situation. In Gammy's mother's case, the operation proved to be all the more interesting because **she** directly **benefited** from the aid donated to her son. Furthermore, **this financial support** has paid for all her interventions in the **news** media!

As for the sponsor couple, it is a matter of access to parenthood, **which they would otherwise be unable to access**. It is an enriching real-life experience **despite the** fact that it is the result of a business transaction. At least, the Farnell's, the GS sponsor couple who were awaiting for Gammy's birth, took legal action to try to get some of the 235, 000 dollars raised by the organization, *Hands across the water*, who help Gammy's mother to survive.

Of course, couples who are trying to have a baby with a GS procedure don't always act like this Australian couple. But this difficult case should make us aware of the danger of this practice. Nicholas Kristoff, one the best journalists in the world, published a few days ago a column titled: "Meet a 21st-Century Slave". He reminded us that Plenty of well-meaning people, like Amnesty International, are advocating for full decriminalization of the sex trade, including of pimps and brothels. It is certainly true that some women and men work in the sex trade voluntarily. Because of my last experience in slums and Manila's streets I would say a lot of poor people prefer to sell their bodies than trying to work in a factory. You get a better pay and it's less exhausting. Yet in practice, they are acting like that because the situation leaves them no choice. And for as long as sex trade remains illegal, the police will still have a reason to raid brothels to search for girls like Poonam, the girl who met Nicholas Kristoff or Sina, or Christina, or millions of boys and girls around the world.

Thank you,