



## **American Islamic Congress, Inc.**

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### **American Islamic Congress Capital Hill Distinguished Speaker Series**

#### **Topic:**

#### **Stopping Women Trafficking in the Muslim World**

#### **Panelists:**

**Dr. Mohammad Mattar: Executive Director of The Protection Project, Johns Hopkins**

**Sanam Anderlini: Independent Consultant on Gender, Peace, and Security Issues**

**Wenchi Yu Perkins: Vice President, Human Rights Programs, Vital Voices Global Partnership**

#### **Moderator:**

**Zainab Al-Suwaij: Executive Director, American Islamic Congress**

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Trafficking in persons is a complex human rights abuse. Across the Muslim world, inequalities in both social status and economic opportunity make women particularly vulnerable to this practice, with individuals trapped in servitude trafficked across borders as well as within their own country. Why are women trafficked? Who are the traffickers? Are women only trafficked for prostitution purposes? On April 1, 2008, Panelists **Dr. Mohammad Mattar** of the Protection Project at Johns Hopkins University, independent consultant **Sanam Anderlini**, and **Wenchi Yu Perkins** of Vital Voices Global Partnership answered these questions and discussed recent global advocacy strategies to stop trafficking.

It is estimated that 2.4 million people, worth approximately 42 billion dollars, are trafficked globally each year. Though assessments of trafficking in the Middle East are poor and exact numbers are not known, human trafficking is still a large problem in the region. Women are often trafficked for both domestic servitude and sexual exploitation.

In the Muslim world, countries involved in trafficking can be divided into three categories: destination countries, transit countries, and origin countries. Women trafficked in the Muslim World are primarily from Bangladesh, Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia but this practice also occurs throughout East Asia, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.

There are several means by which trafficking occurs, and its causes differ vastly in different countries. Often, traffickers present false information to lure women away from their families.

The trafficker is often an individual familiar to the family. He promises the family a job or education for the daughter, though the daughters often find themselves in the sex trade or servitude. After the family approves of the promise, the trafficker abducts the daughter and forces her into slavery. The traffickers often offers the father monetary compensation for his daughter.

There are also two questionable types of marriage practiced in the Muslim world which can lead to trafficking, as **Dr. Mohammad Matter** explained. One is child marriage, or "temporary" marriage, which is popular among Shiites. In this type of marriage, a man sees marriage as financial transaction, and marries with the intention of exploiting his wife. The second type is compensation marriage, which is popular in Pakistan, occurs when the father gives his daughter to a man as a compensation for a crime he committed, who in turn traffics the daughter.

Trafficking is a significant issue in the Muslim World stemming from a combination of many problems in society. Of significant issue is "the absence of anti-trafficking legislation." As **Mattar** noted, "Only two countries in the Muslim world have legislation making trafficking illegal." **Sanam Anderlini** also notes a structural problem for aid and legislation targeting women, which emphasizes "the vulnerability of the victims, the need to reduce demand for trafficking, the need for victim protection and the need to prosecute those involved in trafficking." She adds, "However how much attention or resources are actually being directed towards actual prevention is unknown."

Trafficking is often a result of female vulnerability while searching for a job and an education. As **Wenchi Yu Perkins** points out, "where Muslims are marginalized and belong to a low social class, they also make them more vulnerable to exploitation." Therefore, if more legal economic opportunities are created, the amount of women who become slaves will decrease, the supply will diminish.

The governments and international community also need to focus on reducing vulnerability, refuting misinformation, and preventing people from falling into the trap of traffickers. **Anderlini** continues, "Women and girls who have been trafficked are ashamed to go back to their communities in fear of being ostracized. This fear propels them back to trafficking." And **Perkins** adds, "Even when victims come out for help, they are neglected in the face of obvious exploitation and abuse."

Religious leaders, NGOs, and governments all need to collaborate, raise awareness of trafficking, and play a proactive role in shaping societal values and attitudes so trafficking is of concern. In order to prevent this tragedy, the importance of these trafficking issues must be resonated internationally, new policies and attitudes must be installed, and funding must be given to programs around the world that combat trafficking.