



Children: Not a Travel Destination

“It’s the worst kind of human exploitation imaginable. Can you imagine your children, learning their ABCs, or whatever is the equivalent in their language, being used as sexual slaves for predators? It is a sin against humanity, and it is a horrendous crime.” Colin Powell was describing the nightmare that more than two million children live each year.

Child Sex Tourism (CST) is a multi-million dollar industry which facilitates foreigners sexually exploiting children in another country, some as young as five years old, with the average age of 14. ECPAT-USA (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes), which is working to end child prostitution, pornography and trafficking, reports that perhaps 25% of sex tourists are Americans.

In 1996, the International Hotel & Restaurant Association condemned the sexual exploitation of children and recommended that its members consider measures to prevent the use of their facilities for this purpose. Then, in 2003, ECPAT, developed the Global Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.

In 1999, two non-governmental organizations notified authorities about the sexual exploitation of minors at several hotels in San José, Costa Rica, including the Marriott. Victims reported having been brought to clients in the Marriott. Following a criminal investigation, a Costa Rican was convicted for aggravated pimping of minors and sentenced to serve eight years in prison.

Shareholders of prestigious hotel chains, outraged by this unconscionable abuse of children, filed a shareholder resolution with Marriott asking the company to adopt a policy prohibiting the sexual exploitation of minors on hotel premises. An intensive dialogue between shareholders and senior officials of the company resulted in Marriott International’s Board of Directors approving a change in its Human Rights policy to specifically include a section on the Protection



of Children. Marriott immediately began employee awareness and training on this new policy at all levels of the organization. In the 20 million pre-arrival email messages that it sends each year to registered guests, Marriott includes the Responsible Tourist and Traveler brochure developed by the United Nations World Tourism Organization which contains a message about not engaging in child sex tourism because it is a crime.

The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility has adopted trafficking of children as a core issue. Shareholders, including the Adrian Dominicans, are asking hotel chains, cruise ship, and travel companies to be proactive in addressing the issue of child sex tourism, to ensure that their companies are not contributing to this horrendous human rights violation against children. Following the success with Marriott International, shareholders are currently working with Choice, Hilton, Host, Starwood and Wyndham Hotels, Carnival and Travelocity.

What can I do?

- Stay informed and support the efforts of authorities and the tourism industry.
- If you suspect children are being commercially sexually exploited in tourism destinations, report your suspicions to authorities.
- Support the efforts of NGOs working to protect children from commercial sexual exploitation.
- Sign on to the International Call to End Violence Against Children. www.crin.org/violence/petitions/petition.asp?petID=1004

– Judy Byron, OP
Chair, Corporate Responsibility Committee

Resources: www.thecode.org/; www.ecpatusa.org/

“We walk in solidarity with people who are poor and challenge structures that impoverish them.”

– General Chapter ‘04

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