

Child sex tourism

"Combating child sex tourism." This statement is a good illustration of the gravity of this social issue. How is child sex tourism distinguished from other forms of abuse and exploitation? How widespread is it? Before we can act effectively against this form of exploitation, we must begin by understanding it.

The expression "commercial sexual exploitation of children" means the use of children for sexual gratification by adults for remuneration, which may be in cash or goods. The remuneration may be paid to the child or to a third party. Often, the child supports his or her family with the profits of prostitution. Children trapped in this cycle have difficulty finding the support they need to escape it. There are four types of commercial sexual exploitation of children: trafficking and sale of children, pornography, prostitution and sex tourism.

Trafficking in children for sexual purposes involves the recruiting of children by force or by trickery, and their sale to people who use them to produce pornography or as prostitutes. Child pornography is the depiction of sexual activity or situations involving children using any medium: photography, film, video, etc. Child prostitution is the use of children for sexual purposes in exchange for money or any other type of recompense.

Child sex tourism is practised by travellers. It is a type of prostitution, insofar as it always involves some form of remuneration, be it money, gifts or food.

There are three categories of sex tourists who abuse children.

First, there are true pedophiles, who have an exclusive sexual preference for prepubescent children. Next are so-called preferential sex tourists. These are people who have an active, but not exclusive, sexual preference for children. Although they are also in the minority, they are viewed as particularly dangerous. The third and most frequent category is situational offenders. These are ordinary travellers who do not have a sexual preference for children or minors, but succumb to temptation when an opportunity arises.

Sex tourism has tragic consequences for the children who are victims. They are often beaten, and obviously exposed to all manner of diseases. In girls, pregnancies and repeated abortions are frequent. Children who are sexually exploited suffer psychologically, which leaves permanent scars.

Sex tourism has disrupting, even devastating effects on the social fabric and the economies of the destination countries involved. Criminal activity and violence are never far away. Eventually, the entire local population is affected because the vast majority of tourists, especially families, end up staying away from regions with negative reputations.

Tourists who engage in sexual activity with children are committing a crime. They therefore run the risk of ending up in prison and seeing their personal and professional lives destroyed. Added to this is the danger of contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

Governments' attention has been focused on this issue for some time, thanks in part to the actions of the United Nations. Adopted in 1959, the Declaration on the Rights of the Child lays down such rights as the right to be protected from any form of exploitation. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child puts forward a set of standards and obligations that are universally accepted and non-negotiable. In 2000, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was strengthened with the adoption of two optional protocols: the first concerns the involvement of children in armed conflicts, and the second deals with the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

In addition, some forty countries—including Canada, France and the U.K.—have passed so-called extraterritorial legislation, which allows them to prosecute their own citizens for all sex crimes committed abroad against children. In other words, it no longer matters where the crime is committed.

As such, under the Criminal Code, the courts in Canada can prosecute a Canadian citizen for a sexual offence perpetrated against a child in another country. This provision applies to all children regardless of nationality; this includes Canadian children outside the country. Tour operators and travel agencies who attempt to facilitate sex tourism involving minors can also be held criminally responsible for their actions.

The travel and tourism industry is extremely concerned about child sex tourism, and in recent years has been taking more and more actions to combat the problem. Obviously, raising awareness is very important. It will not stop

pedophiles or preferential sex tourists. But awareness-raising initiatives can be a deterrent to situational offenders.

In 2008, Transat adopted a sustainable tourism policy that sets forth the principles and values that it intends to comply with and promote. The policy clearly states the company's position against any and all forms of child sex tourism. Where our staff is concerned, we are putting the accent on training our front-line teams, whose members are more likely to witness dubious situations. We also want to raise awareness among all our employees. In the case of travellers, our efforts are focused on raising awareness of the consequences of sex tourism. Lastly, we are working closely with our partners.

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