

**Parliamentary Joint Committee on the
Australian Crime Commission**

**Inquiry into trafficking in women for
sexual servitude**

Submission No:21

Received 26 September 2003

Ms Dianne Rokvic

Infrastructure Coordinator

Centre Against Sexual Assault House



E-mail:

rokvicd@cryptic.rch.unimelb.edu.au

22nd September, 2003

The Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Australian Crime Commission
Suite S1 107
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Madam/Sir

I am writing in relation to the Submission Inquiry into trafficking in women for sexual servitude.

The Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA House) is attached to the Royal Women's Hospital and provides specialized support to victim/survivors of past and recent sexual assault. The Centre provides a 24-hour service including face to face and telephone support. Over the past 15 years CASA House has provided services to nearly 15, 000 victim/survivors through the provision of crisis care, counselling, advocacy and group work.

The trafficking of women and girls into Australia for the purposes of illegal prostitution is an issue of great concern to this service. This crime constitutes a violation of international human rights and targets particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of women, mostly from poorer or Third world countries. Although this appears to be a growing problem of global proportions, it remains largely hidden or underground in nature, creating difficulty in identifying how prevalent this crime actually is in Australia. It is clear however, that the traffickers have devised a very sophisticated system towards the continuation of violence against women throughout the world. Unfortunately this trade relies upon heavy demand for trafficked women by "customer's". One way of addressing this growing level of demand would be for the government to direct overseas aid towards addressing the factors that make trafficked women vulnerable in the first place, including violence, poverty, and war.

Women who have been trafficked into this country may have been forced or coerced into prostitution against their will or were under the impression that they were going to undertake other work on arrival. Unfortunately some of these women also end up in Detention Centres and are then subjected to further deprivations of their rights to liberty and freedom. Given the specific experiences of this group of women, it seems that alternative accommodation to the detention system would be most appropriate, so that they do not

experience further punishment for the circumstances in which they find themselves.

The current inquiry into trafficking of women for sexual servitude provides a timely opportunity for the Australian government to show its commitment to this very serious human rights issue and to work towards the promotion of rights for those who are most vulnerable. Such an approach would place trafficked women and children's protection at the core. Some of the recommendations that we believe would be effective in the long term include legislative changes that are aimed at better protecting trafficked women and children and would form a whole of government approach to trafficking involving NGO's, local and state authorities. Australia could also draw on the approaches undertaken by other countries on this issue, including the United States of America and the Netherlands. In these countries a trafficking-victims visa is available, enabling these women to remain in the country if they provide information to law enforcement authorities or are willing to testify in trafficking cases. This temporary visa would also allow these women to begin to recover from their ordeals, during which time counselling or alternative accommodation services may need to be accessed. Bi-lateral and multi-lateral initiatives that ensure that trafficked women who return to their countries are linked in with support agencies in those countries would also be useful in enhancing long-term recovery.

In conclusion, a clear way forwards that is focused on the protection of the human rights of these women is for the Australian government to ratify the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children. This would send a clear message to the international community that this is an issue Australia takes seriously and for which there are very dire consequences for those who are involved in the operations of such a deplorable trade.

Yours Sincerely,

Dianne Rokvic
Infrastructure Coordinator
Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA House)