



Conference on Human Trafficking: The Dilemma of Demand

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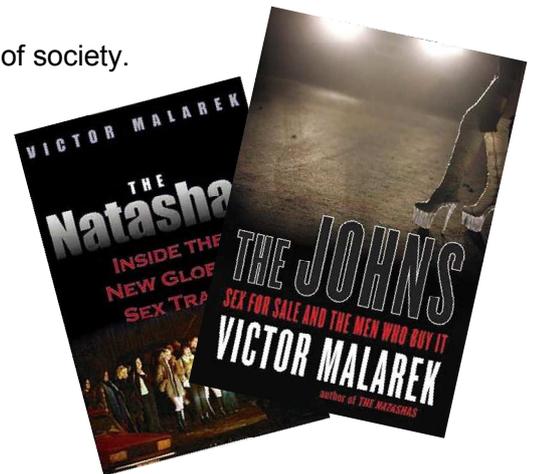
In recent months the Irish Immigration Council of Ireland did a report on Human Trafficking in Ireland. This was funded by the Sisters of Charity helped by Ruhama and other agencies.

As a follow up to the report this Conference on Demand was arranged.

Sr Stanislaus Kennedy opened by referring to the report on Human Trafficking in Ireland. Some salient points she covered were:

- The report uncovers 'a heartbreaking and sickening' scene. It confirms that Human Trafficking is a serious issue in Ireland. There are 1,000 plus women in prostitution each day. Any idea that these women are free is erroneous.
- Our perceptions affect our attitudes and subsequently our responses. Many perceive non-nationals in prostitution as illegal immigrants for gain and consequently our response can be prejudiced and indifferent to them.
- The men 'fuelling' the demand are well paid men from all ranks of society.
- The damage done to the women survivors needs to be highlighted.

Key Speaker was Victor Malerek, an investigative journalist, author of 'The Natashas' and recently 'The Johns', not very pleasant reading.. His address was very informative and thought provoking.



A few of the points which he stressed were:

1. Men believe they have a right to buy sex when they like and incorrectly justify this practice by believing women and children are in the 'flesh trade' for the money and that's their livelihood.
2. Some say legalise prostitution. Are we then saying this is all we have to offer to alleviate poverty? Are we also saying that the sex trade is a profession meriting the respect and equality of other professions?
3. Legalisation of prostitution leads to a dramatic increase of organised crime.
4. It is women who are stigmatised and men are 'clients' or 'customers'!
5. Men must accept that they are solely responsible. Without 'fuelling' the demand there will be no supply for this global tragedy.
6. Governments largely act as though women are of little significance. The attitude generally is, 'Boys will be boys', they need 'to sow their wild oats'. It is a rite of passage for them!
7. There is some progress in Europe in legislation planning. i.e. Now the abuse of power and the abuse of vulnerability is sufficient grounds for guilt when a woman has no alternative.

A few concluding points.

We have to ask: **What kind of Society do we want?**

We must ask, is it ethical to buy sex? If not, then what is our response politically?

Human Trafficking is the most violent demeaning and dishonest treatment of women. In Ireland it is predominantly Irish men who buy sex.

***Human Trafficking needs to be a Justice issue not an immigration issue.
Human trafficking is an issue of inequality and gender.***

The Home office in the UK has started a study on why women go into prostitution. The political progress is somewhat encouraging with the support of Jackie Smith. The Crimes and Policing Bill should make some further progress.

The Conference was impressive considering the number of people there, young lay people so committed to this work. One still came away, however, with the weight of apathy, denial and 'blindness' obstructing the best of efforts. More than ever I am convinced of the urgency to continue our work of raising awareness.

The next port of call planned for APT (Action to prevent Trafficking) is the GAA Sports Committee Boards.

I encourage people to talk in any situation and continue to raise awareness.

