



Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women

Trafficking in Persons and the 2010 Olympics

Briefing Paper

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The link between trafficked persons - particularly trafficking into the sex industry - and large sporting events is not new. The link is based on the assumption that there is “a huge rise in demand for cheap sex around large sporting events”¹, and while this assumption continues to gain international attention, trafficking for this purpose is largely unfounded. Data from previous sporting events indicates that an increase of trafficking in persons into forced prostitution does not occur around sporting events.

Given the international “hype” on this issue, it is no surprise that discussion around trafficking in persons and forced prostitution in relation to the 2010 Olympics has been gaining momentum in Vancouver and across Canada.

This Briefing Paper will examine the problem with linking trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation with sporting events, highlight the impact of campaigns that address this “problem”, and raise some recommendations for Vancouver City Council in light of the upcoming 2010 Olympics.

Defining the Problem

Trafficking in persons is defined by three elements – the movement of a person; with deception or coercion; into a situation of forced labour, servitude or slavery-like practice – and is a very serious human rights violation. It is important for governments to address trafficking, but equally important that governments do so using reliable data, ensure the human rights of trafficked persons are protected, and recognise trafficking in all areas, including agriculture, domestic work, construction, factory work and begging, as well as the sex industry.

Internationally, there is a strong tendency to focus only on trafficking for sexual exploitation as it can be seen as an absolute and immoral exploitation of women. There is also a tendency to confuse prostitution and trafficking as though they were synonymous with each other. As such, linking trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and sporting events is a common response to international sporting events, but it is typically based on misinformation, poor data, and a tendency to sensationalise the issue. This can be seen by looking at the 2004 Olympics in Greece and the 2006 World Cup, which are both frequently cited by anti-trafficking advocates as evidence of increased trafficking for forced prostitution during sporting events. At both of these events, advocates and media warned of enormous increases in trafficking – 20,000 to 40,000 women trafficked into forced prostitution – but there is no evidence of this occurring:

Incidents of trafficking at international sporting events

Year	Location	Event	Trafficking
2004	Athens, Greece	2004 Olympics	There was an “anticipated” increase of 20,000 forced prostitutes, many to be trafficked, in Athens. In reality, “only” 181 trafficked persons were reported in all of 2004 in Greece, and according to Greece’s Annual Report on Organised Crime and International Organisation on Migration (IOM) Athens, there were no instances of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation during the 2004 Olympics. ²
2006	Berlin, Germany	World Cup	There was an estimate of 40,000 forced prostitutes who would be “introduced” to Germany for the World Cup. In reality, all data, information and expert statements strongly indicate this did not occur either during or after the World Cup. ³

Unfortunately, much energy and funding has been put into national and municipal campaigns to prevent trafficking in persons before and during sporting events – with little known benefit for such campaigns - and this trend seems to be reoccurring in Vancouver and across Canada.

Recent media reports highlight the debate with some NGOs and faith-based organisations speaking out against trafficking for forced prostitution during the 2010 Vancouver Olympics and distributing “educational kits” in Canadian schools. There have also been calls for the government – at all levels – to “stand up to the plate and say [Canadians] are not open for this kind of business”.⁴

The RCMP have countered the claims that trafficking will increase because of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. “We haven’t, to this point in time, had any reports to suggest that there will be any increase in human trafficking during these Games. We have nothing to suggest we will,” said Corporal Norm Massie, a former head of the RCMP’s human trafficking section in BC.⁵

This perspective is also shared by GAATW member organisation, Ban Ying, a non-governmental organisation in Berlin which works on trafficking in Germany and provides assistance to trafficked women. In a report analysing trafficking during the 2006 World Cup, Ban Ying, highlighted a number of other reasons why an increase in “forced prostitution” during sporting events is unlikely⁶:

- 1) Trafficking in persons is a business; traffickers want to make profits. It is costly to bring a woman without valid residence papers into another country. Women forced into prostitution would not make enough money for the perpetrators through the duration of the event.
- 2) Trafficking in persons in most cases means that the women are residing illegally in the country. Large sporting events have an increased police presence in the cities where the games are being played. Therefore, the risk to be uncovered is much higher than during other times. In practice, it is evident that traffickers are avoiding places where they could raise suspicion due to the “illegality of the women under the immigration laws”.
- 3) The priority of soccer fans travelling to a city where the games are taking place is to watch the games. How much money, time and energy will then be left for a visit to a sex worker?

Nevertheless, it remains unclear how much attention this issue will gain in Vancouver and across Canada in the coming eleven months.

The impact of anti-trafficking campaigns

A major concern regarding anti-trafficking campaigns that focus on trafficking for forced prostitution during international sporting is that these campaigns can have very harmful effects on the very people they aim to protect.

For example, prostitution is legal in Germany; however, “police in Berlin raided 71 brothels in the city during the 2006 World Cup; they found no evidence of trafficking – but did deport ten women.”⁷ The objective was to protect migrant or “foreign” women from exploitation, but in doing so, police targeted sex workers, aggressively raided brothels and intensified checks on brothels. These types of “rescue raids” are increasingly being used to stop trafficking in persons, however, reports from many countries around the world – such as Cambodia, the Philippines and the USA⁸ – reveal that these raids lead to extreme human rights violations of migrants, sex workers and trafficked people; harassment of sex workers; immediate detention and deportation of migrants without proper investigation; and sometimes re-victimisation of trafficked persons as police focus on ‘law and order’ rather than victim protection.

“Instead of taking a stand for improving the legal situation of the women affected [whether migrants or sex workers], the issue of trafficking is often being used to criminalise sex workers.”⁹ In fact, the media “hype” on trafficking surrounding the 2006 World Cup was used by the United States of America government to lobby Germany against the legalisation of prostitution.¹⁰

Fear of increased trafficking is also being used to restrict the entry of migrants. In the name of preventing trafficking, governments have developed restrictive entry policies denying women of certain ages or certain

appearance entrance into a country.¹¹ This can increase during the lead up to international sporting events where media and public pressure around trafficking for forced prostitution can lead to profiling of potential trafficked persons and tighter restrictions for entrance.

Actions to prevent trafficking prior to and during sporting events have included national and local public awareness campaigns (targeting trafficked persons, clients, or the general public etc.), national and local hotlines to help trafficked persons, intensive raids on brothels, intensified checks or controls on brothels or sex clubs, media campaigns etc. These actions can be particularly damaging when they do not engage with or include groups that may be affected by such campaigns such as sex workers, or groups where trafficked persons are likely to be found such as construction or workers in informal sectors.

Another angle: Trafficking and sporting events

While the majority of attention is placed on trafficking for sexual exploitation, other more realistic concerns regarding trafficking and exploitation have been raised during recent Olympic Games in 2004 and 2008.

One was the PlayFair campaign, an international effort by unions, NGOs and labour groups to draw attention to inhuman working conditions in the world sportswear sector. It was launched prior to the 2004 Athens Olympics and aimed “to pressure sportswear and athletic footwear companies, the International Olympics Committee ... as well as national governments, into taking identifiable and concrete measures to eliminate the exploitation and abuse of the mostly women workers in the global sporting goods industry.”¹² This campaign continued for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Another concern raised prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympics was in relation to the exploitation of construction workers – largely migrants – who were working on sports venues prior to the games. The Chinese government admitted that six workers had been killed in workplace accidents at Olympic venues.¹³ While this is largely related to labour conditions and labour rights in China, it is also connected with conditions formed by hosting the Olympics games – a sudden need for specific sports venues and housing for athletes within a limited time period which may lead to extended working hours and an increase in risk for workers.

While neither of these two situations directly address trafficking, they both highlight highly exploitative labour conditions and sectors that frequently rely on migrant workers, which increases the risk for trafficking cases. Improving and regulating working conditions will also decrease the likelihood of trafficking for labour exploitation, which many see as the greatest link between trafficking in persons and sporting events.

GAATW General Recommendations

1. Use an evidence-based approach when adopting anti-trafficking measures, including campaigns. Given its cover and criminal nature, trafficking is very difficult to quantify and so statistics are frequently unsubstantiated. It is important to properly assess the situation and use accurate evidence in order to act proportionally appropriate to the problem.
2. Discuss with sex workers groups and/or advocates to develop ways to increase the safety of sex workers during the Games. If the major concern being raised is the exploitation or abuse of women in the sex industry, consultations must occur with sex workers to identify and implement strategies to improve safety based on their safety concerns and needs.
3. In the case of developing an anti-trafficking campaign around the Olympics, ensure that these campaigns are developed with input from affected communities, including trafficked persons, migrant workers, unions/relevant labour sectors, sex workers etc.
4. Closely monitor construction projects during the lead-up to the Games to ensure labour rights are protected for all workers.

The **Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women** (GAATW) is an Alliance of more than 90 non-governmental organisations from all regions of the world. The GAATW International Secretariat is based in Bangkok, Thailand, and coordinates the activities of the Alliance, collects and disseminates information, and advocates on behalf of the Alliance at regional and international level. Three of our members are from Canada, including GAATW Canada, based in Victoria; another of our members is Ban Ying, who worked on trafficking in Germany during the 2006 World Cup.

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Additional resources:

Trafficking in Human Beings and the 2006 World Cup in Germany
Report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2007.

Dramatic Increase in Forced Prostitution? The World Cup and the consequences of an unscreened rumour
Report by Dr. Nivedita Prasad and Babette Rohner, Ban Ying, 2006.

¹ "Human Trafficking Could be Huge Issue During 2010 Olympics: Women's Groups", Camille Bains. Canadian Press, 9 Dec 2006.

² *Dramatic Increase in Forced Prostitution?* Dr. Nivedita Prasad and Babette Rohner, Ban Ying, 2006. p3.

Trafficking in Human Beings and the 2006 World Cup in Germany. International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2007. P 11.

³ *Trafficking in Human Beings and the 2006 World Cup in Germany.* IOM, 2007. p 5, 13.

⁴ *Human Trafficking Could be Huge Issue During 2010 Olympics.* Camille Bains, Canadian Press, 9 December 2006.

⁵ *Human Trafficking at the 2010 Winter Olympics?* Jeff Lee, Canada.com, 7 January, 2009.

⁶ *Dramatic Increase in Forced Prostitution?* Dr. Nivedita Prasad and Babette Rohner, Ban Ying, 2006.

⁷ *Where are the 40,000? Statement on Trafficking during the World Cup.* Ban Ying, July 2008.

⁸ "Kicking the Door Down", Melissa Ditmore. Sex Workers Project, Urban Justice Centre, 2008.

⁹ *Where are the 40,000?* Ban Ying. p 4.

¹⁰ *Trafficking in Human Beings and the 2006 world Cup,* IOM.

¹¹ *Collateral Damage.* GAATW, 2007.

¹² *No medal for the Olympics on labour rights.* PlayFair campaign, 2008.

¹³ "One Year of My Blood" *Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers in Beijing.* Human Rights Watch, Vol. 20 No.3, 2008. http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/china0308_1.pdf