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◀ *Unsupervised children wandering the streets of Poipet near the Cambodia/Thailand border are easy targets for traffickers.*

is not just toward the sex industry,” said Richard Johannessen, World Concern’s Asia Area Director, who is based in Bangkok. “People are bought and sold for slavery in sweatshops, as child brides, for circuses, sacrificial worship, forced begging, hard labor, domestic servitude and for the sale of human organs.”

The shocking statistics around child trafficking have only recently reached living room conversations in the developed world, but awareness of the problem is growing. The 2010 TIP Report marks the tenth year in the fight against modern slavery, which began with the United Nation’s Palermo Protocol in 2000. The protocol encourages governmental responses to incorporate prevention, criminal prosecution and victim protection. While progress is being made in understanding the web of destruction caused by human trafficking, a summary of the TIP report notes, “10 years of focused effort to combat trafficking only represents the infancy of this modern movement.”

Southeast Asia is seeing increasing implementation of prevention programs and networking among agencies involved in child protection. Many NGOs are focusing on prevention in hopes of protecting larger numbers of children, and are leaving the rescue and rehabilitation of victims to organizations that specialize in these tactics, such as International Justice Mission.

“This is not just a Southeast Asia problem,” warns Johannessen, noting that massage parlors and other businesses in any large U.S. city can be staffed with women and young girls who have been trafficked. “Keep in mind that it’s on your doorstep as well.”

### Identifying risk factors

Poverty and migration top the list of issues that put people at risk for trafficking, says Ana Maria Clamor, who heads World Concern’s Child Protection Program. “When people are desperate, they’re willing to do anything. That desperation makes them vulnerable,” explained Clamor. “People who are poor typically lack information about the danger of trafficking.”

Families that migrate to urban centers in search of work are vulnerable to offers for money that could lead to danger. Children are often left unsupervised while parents work, notes Johannessen, and consequently become easy targets for traffickers.

Nattakarn Noree, coordinator of the San Jai Network, a consortium of 96 Christian NGOs in Thailand that fight trafficking, tells the story of a 17-year-old Burmese boy who was trafficked ▶

*\*Children’s names in this article have been changed.*

# The Power of Prevention

## ▶ Incorporating child protection while working in trafficking hot spots.

By Cathy Herholdt, Staff Writer, World Concern

**B**OPHA\* HAD MORE THAN THREE strikes against her by the time she was 14. The oldest child of five siblings and divorced parents, Bopha’s father was a drug addict, her step-father an alcoholic and her mother unemployed. The family lives in Poipet, Cambodia, a town along the Thailand border known for its casinos, beggars and dark reputation as a hub for human trafficking.

Last year, Bopha’s mother sold her to a soldier in exchange for a piece of land. At first she was forced to do household work; then the man began raping her.

“I cried out loud to ask for help, but no one could help me,” said Bopha. “I wanted to run away from the house the next day, but I could not because there were a lot of soldiers watching and surrounding the house. The man did this to me again and again ... my body and my heart were painful.”

Bopha eventually escaped her enslavement by pretending she was sick and getting permission to leave the house to get medicine. She waited for the right moment and asked someone for help. She was directed to Cambodian Hope Organization (CHO), a small NGO that operates a safe

haven in Poipet for victims of trafficking.

“I asked a motor-taxi driver to drive me as fast as he could to meet with CHO staff because I was very afraid that they would chase me,” recalled Bopha. CHO staff members took her to the safe haven where the long healing process began.

The threat of child trafficking is very real, particularly in border areas where the migration rate is high and there are significant pockets of poverty. The Greater Mekong Subregion of Southeast Asia has many characteristics of a high-risk area, including access to Thailand, where people migrate from all over the world in search of economic opportunities and a better life.

According to the U.S. State Department’s 2010 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, the prevalence of trafficking victims in the world is 1.8 per 1,000 inhabitants. In Asia, that figure is 3 per 1,000. Statistics show a 59 percent increase in victims identified worldwide since the last report just two years ago. Unfortunately, that figure represents only 49,105 of the estimated 12.3 million adults and children enduring forced labor and prostitution around the world. “Trafficking



Photos: Derek Sciba/World Concern

*Boys are trained to repair motorbikes so they can seek safe employment, making them less vulnerable to trafficking.*

## Do Something!

NGOs can begin by examining World Concern's framework to address the complex nature of child trafficking:

- **Safe in Community** – Aims to keep children safe in their community through both formal and non-formal education, including workshops on child abuse awareness and child rights.
- **Safe Migration** – Gives children and families information they need if they are considering migration, including information on the dangers of trafficking, HIV/AIDS awareness, and knowledge of sexual and reproductive health.
- **Safe Haven** – Provides a home to rehabilitate children who have been trafficked or abused.
- **Strength in Network** – Supports the San Jai Network to enable members to help one another, share learning and develop joint strategies for greater impact related to protection issues affecting children and women.

to Thailand after being offered a job by a taxi driver. He followed the man to a pier where he was knocked unconscious. The boy woke up on a fishing boat in Malaysia. Young people, desperate for income, are lured by traffickers with similar ploys every day around the world.

Poverty encompasses numerous risk factors, including children not attending school and parents relying on them to help earn income to support the family. Lack of citizenship in rural areas also puts children at risk as they lack legal rights and are unable to access social services, education and healthcare.

NGOs also support programs in Battambang, Cambodia, a town along the path of migration to Thailand, where large numbers of children spend their days searching for recyclables in the city dump to sell. "They are unsupervised by their parents or other adults while they are at the garbage dump or on the streets," said Clamor. "Human traffickers prey on children like these."

Disasters also create a risk for children being trafficked. The Haiti earthquake is a case in point. In its aftermath an increased number of children were trafficked across the border to the Dominican Republic and from there, around the world.

"During the emergency, the border was opened—nicely opened—because it was useful for humanitarian reasons," said UNICEF Representative in Haiti Françoise Gruloons-Ackermans in an October 15, 2010 article on

the agency's website. "But we heard about a lot of movement of children. And among them were probably children who were trafficked."

UNICEF also fears that worsened economic pressures faced by families after the disaster could allow traffickers to convince parents to give up their children for what they think might be a better life.

The TIP Report suggests aid and relief organizations work to reduce the gaps after a disaster that traffickers could later exploit. Working to identify vulnerable children and reunite them with family members should be a priority.

### Long-term solutions

Breaking the cycle of poverty is a frontline approach in child protection. Enabling parents to earn an income through vocational training, microlending and small business support reduces the need for families to migrate and means their children are less likely to have to work.

"We raise people out of poverty so that they won't migrate, and parents won't be tricked into giving away their children," said Johannessen. "In Southern Laos, on the border of Thailand, where it was traditional for 16-year-old girls to go across the Mekong River and become prostitutes ... by virtue of development programs, those families are now raising coffee as a cash crop, and are able to make enough money to send their children to school."

Informing children and adults about the risk of trafficking is another primary approach. Child protection can be as simple as warning potential victims about trafficking scams, and warning people who educate children about the issue of child trafficking.

Much of the work NGOs are doing in impoverished countries is already helping protect children. Educational and vocational training programs are by nature anti-trafficking opportunities, keeping children off the streets and preparing them for future work.

Integrating curricula about child abuse and child rights can be powerful, as was the case with 10-year-old Nong Ae who attended a child abuse awareness workshop in Thailand. Her mother, a former sex worker, had been taking her to visit an American man at a guesthouse near their home in Chiang Mai. The man gained the young girl's trust by giving her expensive gifts—a bicycle, cell phone and laptop. Then he began sexually molesting her and paying her mother 1,500 Baht (\$47) in return. If the girl refused to go, her mother would beat her.

At the child abuse training, this young girl realized she was a victim of abuse and, afterward, called a government hotline to report her perpetrator. The 72-year-old man was arrested on June 18, 2010. The story made national news.

Helping families migrate safely is another way NGOs can help. This includes providing information on the danger of trafficking, HIV/AIDS awareness and knowledge of sexual and reproductive health.

### Strengthening capacity and working in partnership

Preparation and properly trained staff are critical before stepping into the issue of child protection.

"Sometimes an NGO can do more harm than good," said Clamor. "First you have to understand what child protection is, then how you can integrate this into what you're doing. Don't do it alone. You really have to coordinate with the government and other NGOs, because it is a huge problem."

CHO found themselves in this situation with Bopha, who began displaying severe psychological problems after entering their safe haven. There were also legal issues to tackle, as her perpetrator was a soldier with influence.

"The case became very complicated. CHO had to refer her to another organization (International Justice Mission) that could help her with her legal issues," said Carmen Aurora Garcia, a program officer with World Concern's Child Protection Program. "There is risk to being involved with very powerful criminals, even the risk of being killed. Rescue is very dangerous. Have a referral system in place if you are or might be dealing directly with child protection issues."

CHO Director Chomno In stresses the importance of networking, sharing resources and information, building good relationships with local authorities and working with church leaders as vital components of effective prevention and rescue work.

Garcia calls these locals "champions"—those who will advocate for people in their community. "Local partners know the context and they know the problems," she said. "As an organization, prioritize what you do best and work in partnership with other agencies or institutions in a collaborative way. Traffickers are well organized and they work very well with other international dealers. It is a business and an industry and we have to think like them, or even better than the ones leading and organizing it." 