

PHILIPPINES SEX TOURISM



Stay out, DOT tells sex tourists

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SOME foreign male tourists may be hiring local prostitutes but tourists in general do not come to the Philippines only for sex, tourism officials said.

Tourism Secretary Ramon Jimenez Jr. on Monday admitted that sex tourism exists but these are only “isolated cases.”

“Everywhere in the world, men go to find sex. This happens, but you have to ask, do they come to the Philippines just for that?” Jimenez asked.

“The reason people come to the Philippines is to see the beautiful sights and to go shopping,” he said.

Jimenez gave assurances that the Aquino administration was trying to find ways to address the problem.

“To visitors who come here for sex, our message to them is that we don’t want your business here. It’s not our line of business,” he said.

Jimenez pointed out that the role of the Department of Tourism is to promote the country’s positive side.

Tourism Assistant Secretary Benito Bengzon said that the issue on sex tourism has been blown up.

“Based on our statistics, foreign tourists come here primarily to go shopping, sightseeing and visiting friends. We would like to think that cases of foreigners going here for sex are isolated,” Bengzon added.

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women-Asia Pacific (CATW-AP) earlier said that the government turned a blind eye on sex tourism by not admitting it exists.

The group’s executive director, Jean Enriquez, said that even children are involved in sex tourism in Boracay.

She claimed that in Cebu, some tourists are escorted by pimps.

Enriquez said that sex tourism is rampant in world-famous Boracay in Aklan, Pagsanjan in Laguna and Angeles City in Pampanga.

Malacañang said that efforts to curb human trafficking and prostitution are continuing.

Spokesman Edwin Lacierda also on Monday said that the Palace has ordered the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to curb prostitution and human trafficking.

“We’ve always maintained that we are trying to do our best in curbing, not only prostitution but also (human) trafficking. We’ve never turned a blind eye on that,” Lacierda added.

He said that the PNP and DOJ were instructed to file charges against maintainers of prostitution dens and “make sure that the cases are strong enough.”

Ref.: <http://www.manilatimes.net/index.php/news/top-stories/9481-stay-out-dot-tells-sex-tourists>

One priest's crusade against sex tourism in the Philippines

Rev. Shay Cullen's campaign against sex tourism epitomizes faltering efforts to combat the problem in the Philippines and throughout Southeast Asia.

From his sprawling establishment overlooking Subic Bay, the Rev. Shay Cullen surveys a city that seems almost as subverted by the trafficking of women, many under age, as it was before the US shut down its naval base here nearly 20 years ago.

The sailors who once flooded the streets on shore leave are no longer here, except on brief visits during military exercises, but the city has never lived down the reputation it got for the sex trade that flourished around what was America's biggest Naval base outside the US.

“Sex tourism is unchecked and trafficking is rampant,” says Mr. Cullen, a Columban priest from Ireland who’s been crusading since 1974 against what he sees as a “mafia-like” conspiracy by foreign men and Filipinos to exploit under-age victims. “The local government supports the sex industry, the prosecutors are mostly corrupt, and the judges too.”

Cullen seems like a latter-day Don Quixote tilting at windmills as he leads often fruitless manhunts for traffickers among the foreigners who come to this once-thriving base city 50 miles northwest of Manila.

His crusade epitomizes faltering efforts in the Philippines and throughout Southeast Asia to combat the trafficking of women, many in their teens, almost all from poor families living in squalor amid rising prices and fewer jobs. If the challenge appears hopeless, it’s not for lack of effort on the part of Cullen and others – dedicated, if nothing else, to raising awareness of the problem.

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“We have a great deal of admiration for what they do,” says Andrey Sawchenko, director in the Philippines for the International Justice Mission, talking about the organization Cullen helped found, PREDA, an acronym for People’s Recovery Empowerment Development Assistance. “It matters hugely to the women and girls they help. Our experience has been that PREDA has been really effective.”

Spurring prosecution

Mr. Sawchenko sees PREDA as having played a leading role in spurring on prosecution of cases of trafficking. As evidence, he cites removal of the Philippines last month from the State Department's "watch list" of countries that are doing little or nothing about it.

The Philippines now has a "tier two" rating – recognition that at least it's attempting to combat the problem – while Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia remain on the watch list. The Philippines got "the promotion," as officials sometimes call it, after prosecutors won 29 convictions against traffickers in a 12-month period after having had only 30 convictions in the previous five years from 2005 to 2010, none the result of PREDA's activities.

Khrisna Avila, a consultant with the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking, set up by the Department of Justice to combat the problem, acknowledges, however, that nearly 1,200 cases are still pending. The State Department's latest country-by-country report on trafficking worldwide is severely critical despite the upgrade.

"Widespread corruption and an inefficient judicial system continue to pose very serious challenges to the successful prosecution of trafficking cases," says the report. "Law enforcement officials' complicity in human trafficking remains a pervasive problem in the Philippines, and corruption at all levels of government enables traffickers to prosper."

"We have the laws, we have the rules and regulations," says Josephine Alforque, advocacy officer with the local office of the nongovernmental End Child Prostitution and Child Trafficking, based in Thailand. She cites an antitrafficking act passed eight years ago but complains, "There are no NGOs on the Inter-Agency Council."

The problem, says Ms. Alforque, is worsened by the rapid proliferation of electronic devices for organizing criminal syndicates. "Technology has added to the tools in exploitation of children," she says. "Yes, there are foreign men involved, but there are a lot of local men, too."

Cullen's investigations of abuses by foreign men, from military veterans to tourists and retirees, extend inland to the one-time US base town of Angeles City. On the streets and alleys outside the former Clark Air Base, which closed in 1991 after the eruption of nearby Mount Pinatubo, bars and shops catering to foreigners flourish, as in the old days.

The fact is, however, the sex trade in Angeles never stopped. It seems to have never even slowed down.

Lured by the promise of jobs

Cullen cites a raid on a nightclub in Angeles run by a man described by police as "an Irish fugitive." Dozens of women said they had been lured to Angeles after having been told they would find jobs in factories, offices or restaurants, according to a police report, but instead were forced to become sex workers.

Despite frustrations, Cullen is proud of the program he runs for victims whom he and his staff claim to have rescued from sexual exploitation.

"We have two homes for victims, 27 victims of abuse by their fathers and relatives, 18 saved from sex clubs," Cullen says. They're "reintegrated when recovered" – and eligible for financial aid for 18 months.

Some foreigners say Cullen is looking for publicity and donations rather than real solutions to a festering problem. One retired US Air Force master sergeant, Alan Dale Edmonds, has been battling Cullen's claims in court for years.

"I have been consistently exposing them," says Mr. Edmonds. "Obviously," he goes on, the point for PREDA is "to garner support and rake in money."

Meanwhile, Cullen appears to revel in the acclaim that he's whipped up for his program. Amid repeated attacks by Edmonds and other foreign retirees, Cullen boasts he's twice been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize – recognition that he proudly advertises on banners posted on the wall at the base of the drive up to his establishment.

Regardless of whether Cullen is successful in court, many say he's at least drawn attention to the issue.

"There is a big improvement," says Danny Abunalen, with the Visayan Forum Foundation, which focuses on immigration and trafficking. "Foreigners come into the country for young women. Most of our cases are actually foreigners."

Critics agree with the State Department that the problem of trafficking in the Philippines is not as bad as when sailors on leave flooded the bars – but say Cullen's influence has nothing to do with it.

"There is not as much money as there was in the heyday of the bases," says Edmonds. "There were many more incidents then because women often offered their children in an attempt to get them adopted, [and get them] a better home."

Yes, he adds, "because of the bad apples that any military is stuck with, there were those who took advantage quite often of the poor and the children."

Cullen meanwhile has a ready explanation for why it's difficult to get convictions for foreign club operators offering under-age girls. The government believes sex charges against foreigners are "bad for tourism," he says.

Ref.: <http://news.yahoo.com/one-priests-crusade-against-sex-tourism-philippines-145358535.html>