

Special SBS report: Child sex tourism in the Philippines

March 2, 2012

The opening of the Clark airbase and Subic Bay naval base just three hours north of the capital Manila created the designated 'sex hubs' of Angeles and Olongapo City that exist today. At its height in the 1970s and 1980s, tens of thousands of US officers roamed the area, using it as their playground.

[Fr Shay Cullen](#) of the rescue organisation [PREDA](#) says the establishment of the US military presence was when the trade first started to take root. "It was the brainwashing of the community... officially approved prostitution of women and children, they never bothered about ages" says Cullen.

The bases were closed at the beginning of the 1990s, leaving the booming red-light district as its legacy. According to Fr Shay Cullen, it remains a prime destination for children trafficked into the industry.

The main sex strip of Subic is a kilometre-long stretch of gaudy brightly lit buildings. Club signs promise punters a night of "Oriental escape," or "party hot zones." If these don't convince them, teams of scantily-dressed young women will. Stationed at each entrance, they pose provocatively or dance, waiting to whisper into the ear of the next male passer-by.

Nestled in-between the bars are hole-in-the-wall diners, several of which advertise "Aussie roasts and BBQ," "sausage rolls and meat pies." It's clear which customers are being catered to here.

It's the last place you'd expect dreams to come true, but according to former bar worker [Alma Bulawan](#), that's precisely why women come here. With little education or opportunities for other employment, many arrive hoping to find a partner among their clients; someone who will provide them and their loved ones with the stability and security they've only dreamt of. "If you ask them if they have a choice, they tell us that they don't. From my experience none of these women are working in a club because they want to," says Bulawan.

Bulawan is now the president of the Buklod Center, an organisation which supports sex workers and conducts regular night patrols through the strip to check for underage women and children.

"People in the west need to really realise these things are happening and take full accountability and responsibility for this. Because it's your country, it's your men creating this kind of demand."

While not having the authority to rescue minors, Buklod reports identified children to the City Social Welfare and Development (CSWD). The government office handles their removal and supervises any involvement in cases against recruiters and traffickers. Olongapo court social worker Nova Codoy says regulations in the city have improved. "It's manageable compared to other places and minimised relative to previous years," says Codoy.

At least 18 foreigners have been convicted of trafficking Filipino children for 'sexual purposes' in recent years according to International network [ECPAT \(End Child Prostitution and Trafficking\)](#). The list includes Dutch, Swiss, British, German, Japanese, Korean, Canadian and Australian nationals. Some were found guilty by Philippine courts, while others, were convicted in their home countries. The [Australian Federal Police](#) says it actively monitors child sex tourists and those prosecuted can face jail terms of up to 25 years.

[Cecilia Oebanda](#), founder of nationwide anti-trafficking organisation the [Visayan Forum](#), says despite protective measures overseas governments may have in place, there needs to be a higher level of awareness among the general public.

“People in the west need to really realise these things are happening and take full accountability and responsibility for this. Because it’s your country, it’s your men creating this kind of demand.”

Television report broadcast for SBS [World News Australia](#) 25 February 2012.

Ref.: <http://diversitydiaries.com/2012/03/02/special-sbs-report-child-sex-tourism-in-the-philippines/>

Look MUCH more here: www.Protect.PhilippineChildren.ph