

Coalition Unites to End Sexual Exploitation

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April 7, 2018



Herndon, United States -- A diverse and bipartisan group of more than 600 people attended the 2018 Global Summit to End Sexual Exploitation.

Organized by the non-profit organization National Center on Sexual Exploitation, the conference was held just outside Washington, D.C., in Herndon, Virginia, from April 4 to 7.

More than 600 participants from about 20 nations attended. They represented the myriad approaches being used to end human trafficking and pornography: legislators, academics, child advocates, medical professionals, law enforcement, members of the media, experts in technology, religious groups, therapists, educators, trafficked survivors and their parents, rescuers of trafficking victims, survivor rehabilitators, and representatives of NGOs active at the UN. This large group was clearly bipartisan. This common issue of fundamental human rights has created a powerful collaboration of people who often are not known for cooperating. This bringing together of differences in itself was encouraging.

In the United States, over 8,500 cases of human trafficking were reported last year. Eighty percent of those individuals were forced into sexual commerce as mere commodities. This number has almost doubled in only four years. Worldwide at least 20.9 million are trafficked, of which 96 percent are women and girls used for sexual exploitation. It is estimated that globally 2 million children are sexually enslaved every year through trafficking.

One of the main points of the conference was the strong evidence linking pornography to sex trafficking. Researcher Gary Wilson from the organization Your Brain on Porn explained in detail the faulty research that has popularized a myth that porn is not addictive and not harmful to social and sexual well-being. He showed the overwhelming peer-reviewed research indicating a clear propensity of initial porn use becoming more frequent and extreme in content. He explained that there is also a correlation between porn use and decreases in emotional connection, sexual arousal and erection with an actual sex partner.

Dr. Chyng-Feng Sun from New York University discussed peer-reviewed evidence showing that the addictive quality of porn led to increasingly violent and abusive treatment of women in porn and consequently more violent and abusive acts with real women. The examples of some of the violent acts forced on women and girls in porn, then mimicked in real life, were unimaginable and repulsive. Both Dr. Melissa Farley, a prostitution researcher, and Valiant Richey, a prosecuting attorney from King's County in Washington state, gave compelling reports on the dehumanization of prostitution and trafficking and the efforts at prevention. Throughout the conference, speakers such as Melinda Tankard Reist from Collective Shout Out presented evidence confirming pornography as a key stimulant for buying girls and women for sex.

According to Professor Kelly Oliver from Vanderbilt University, 90 percent of male college students are using porn. Another presentation gave evidence of the sickeningly large increase of children viewing porn and sexually abusing other children at younger and younger ages. Obviously the Internet has increased the availability and usage of porn to anyone and at younger ages. Unfortunately, the availability sometimes

includes elementary and high schools with weak screening programs and irresponsible school administrators, as was stated by Drew and Robin Paterson. The Patersons call themselves "ordinary parents," yet they battled and defeated a school-sponsored digital database that was bringing pornography into their local school system.

Some of the sessions involved disturbing testimonies from women and men who have been trafficked, drugged, and forced into prostitution since they were young, some for decades. One mother described the hellish ordeal her 15-year-old daughter went through when she was tricked by another adolescent girl into being abducted, sold and prostituted. Several speakers made the point that the myth that prostitutes and porn performers "freely choose" this life was a lie used to justify the use of other human beings for one's sexual pleasure. The point was made that the suffering of prostitutes, trafficked individuals, and most porn performers is horrendous, with long-term psychological damage and nothing like the movie *Pretty Woman*.

Researchers, feminists, and media critics gave different perspectives on how porn sexualizes women as sex objects and leads to increasing violence against women and girls. In the current culture a girl's sense of her innate value and dignity has eroded and the sexual objectification of females has become normalized and internalized. One of the presenters, Sharon Slater, the CEO of Family Watch International, described how the Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) curriculum being promoted by some NGOs at the UN and used in numerous school systems sexualizes children by promoting explicit sexual experimentation as a "sexual right" and encourages children to disregard their parents' or religious viewpoint.

Despite these disturbing issues, there were many encouraging presentations about effectively preventing and countering trafficking and pornography. Parliamentarians from several countries described their challenges and victories in bringing legislation to protect individuals from sexual exploitation. Some presenters, such as Ernie Allen, CEO of the International Center for Missing and Exploited Children, described his success with helping 100 countries enact laws to combat trafficking.

Numerous organizations, such as The Samaritan Woman, Awaken, Walk Her Home, and Engedi Refuge Ministries, rescue women, girls, men and boys from sexual enslavement and assist their rehabilitation into healthy and successful lives. Several organizations, such as Fortify, explained their programs that successfully facilitate the overcoming of porn addiction. The important prevention of Internet pornography exposure was discussed by the organization Covenant Eyes. Other organizations or ministries had effective materials, books and curricula for parents to reduce their children's vulnerability to sexual abuse, trafficking, and pornography.

The serendipitous high point of the conference came Friday night, April 6, when it was announced that the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Justice had shut down the world's largest Internet conduit for sex trafficking, Backpage. There could not be a more enthusiastic or deserving crowd to hear this breaking news together. Those whose hard work and persistence were directly responsible for this victory were called on to the stage to be thanked. The cheers were thunderous.

It was Dawn Hawkins, the executive director of the National Center on Sexual Exploitation, who led her small staff to organize this excellent and powerful conference. She deserves much appreciation not only for organizing the event but also for moderating many sessions and speaking passionately on the issues. At times, before jumping up to the stage to introduce the next speaker, with great tenderness she had to hand her infant to her support person. Although never mentioned, her keen and gentle care of her baby was a reminder to the parental heart in us of why this group will keep growing and fighting for freedom from sexual exploitation for all people, especially our children.