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Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission on Human Trafficking –
Human Trafficking: International and National Implications

I am Deborah Sigmund, Founder and Director of Innocent at Risk a 501(c) (3) organization dedicated to preventing child exploitation and child trafficking. I would like to thank the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for asking me to be with you today to talk about THE GREATEST HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE OF THE 21ST CENTURY! – Human Trafficking!

I first learned about human trafficking in the summer of 2002 from a friend living in France. I learned that each year millions of women and children are coerced, tricked, drugged, kidnapped and sold into the underground world of the sex trade. I was horrified that this was happening yet no one spoke about it Child trafficking is happening EVERYWHERE not just in India or China, but everywhere in the world and in every city and town in the U.S. I continued to ask “Why doesn’t anyone know about this and WHY ISN’T THIS FRONT PAGE NEWS?”

From the office of Trafficking In Persons, Department of State, I learned that Human Trafficking is a \$32 billion dollar global industry. It is actually the fastest growing criminal industry in the world. Second only to the drug trade and more lucrative than illegal arms. I learned from the Dept. of State in spite of the number of dedicated Government and Non Government organizations working to combat trafficking there was a great need for awareness and education about the issue. As a result, Innocents at Risk was formed. Since 2004 Innocents at Risk has been working with the Dept. of State, leaders in Congress such as Rep. Carolyn Maloney and Congressman Chris Smith, the Diplomatic Corp., Corporations and the media to educate the public about the horrors of the human trafficking. We built partnerships with NGO’s in the US and abroad.

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As the result of an awareness event two years ago, I met Sandra Fiorini, Senior Flight Attendant for American Airlines. Sandra told me that she and other flight attendants often see suspicious situations in the airports and in the air that could be children being trafficked. Sandra said, “We do not know what to do about it.” As a result, Innocents at Risk produced 10,000 “Protecting Woman and Children from Human Trafficking” brochures containing basic information of “How to Recognize Potential Victims” and containing the National Hotline Number 888.373.7888, run by The Polaris Project. Soon a task force of Sandra and flight attendants sprung into action. We learned from these flight attendants that much trafficking was taking place via commercial airlines. This was a major breakthrough and a real positive step for Prevention.

The flight attendants initiative grew and we learned valuable information from airport personal and specific information was given to the authorities. We were informed that twice a week there were young girls in a flight from Moscow to Chicago with one way tickets who were told they would be “models” or “work in TV” in NYC. I called DHS, a trusted NGO working in Moscow and the Association of Catholic Bishops working in Chicago. With law enforcement and the immediate attention of the NGO’s, lives were actually being saved.

Learning of The Flight Attendant Initiative, in early 2009, John Ingham of DHS assembled together the correct players from DHS, ICE and the FBI to meet with an American Airlines representative (Mike Wascom), The Polaris Project, Sandra Fiorini and Innocents at Risk to discuss how to mobilize this incredible resource of flight attendants who are “The First Line of Defense.”

After meeting for 6 months BLUE LIGHTNING CAMPAIGN was established to Denounce All Forms of Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation Procedures were put in place. For example:

1. To begin training all Airline personal in recognizing situations of human trafficking.
2. To begin training Custom agents and Law enforcement how to recognize human trafficking and how to respond most effectively.



3. Passengers would receive acceptable information about human trafficking in corporate flight magazines, videos, and poster campaigns.
4. Identical training for the travel industry would be incorporated.

It was a tremendous accomplishment! Innocents at Risk applauds American Airlines for coming to the discussion table and we congratulate the leadership of John Ingham for bringing everyone together to establish a protocol to expand this talented force of individuals and agencies. HOWEVER, THE BLUE LIGHTNING CAMPAIGN IS NOW ON HOLD AS IT HAS NOT BEEN FUNDED...

To date, Innocents at Risk is continuing our informal training of flight attendants. We have Senior Flight Attendants based in Chicago, Miami, New York, Idaho, Atlanta, Ohio, Kentucky and Detroit who are training fellow flight attendants with our awareness brochures. We have partnered with Airline Ambassadors who bring this effort a vital work force of over 6, 000 members and corporate partners dedicated to preventing child trafficking in the U.S. and around the world. With their focus to stop child trafficking, we have already had some successes. Calls to the hotline had been made, planes have been met by the authorities and lives are being saved. However, this is ONLY A FRACTION OF CHILDREN WHO COULD BE SAVED.

We need to do more! We need to train ALL Airline personal. Today, we are asking Congress to help fund the efforts of Innocents at Risk and the entire Blue Lightning Campaign which is ready to go. Help us wake up America and “Open their Eyes” of the public to this horror happening all around us. IN THE NAME OF CHILDREN, today we ask for your support and funding to help us prevent more innocent lives from slipping away.

Thank you.

Deborah S. Sigmund, Founder
Innocents at Risk