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Report of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination
and Protection of Minorities on its forty-sixth session

Written statement submitted by the International Abolitionist
Federation, a non-governmental organization (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement
which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council
resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[28 December 1994]

Draft programme of action for the prevention of
traffic in persons and the exploitation of the
prostitution of others (E/CN.4/1994/71)

1. The International Abolitionist Federation held its 31st International Congress in Bucharest, Romania in September 1994. One of the main preoccupations of the several hundred participants who, hailed from all corners of the world, was the increasingly widespread instances of sexual abuses inflicted upon women and children. Although the main focus of the Congress was on countries in transition, all participants were made painfully aware that these gross violations of human rights take place in practically all countries, rich and poor alike.

2. A few quotes from the Congress resolutions will bring us to the crux of the matter:

"The Congress expresses its grave concern at the massive sexual exploitation of women and girls in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in prostitution, sex trafficking, sex tourism, pornography and mail order bride markets. For the women of this area, the introduction of a market economy and the opening of the borders have been accompanied by the movement of organised crime into their countries and the devaluation of many women and children as sexual merchandise."

The Congress also expressed its grave concern at:

"... the proliferation of pornography and pornographic imagery, and the movement of these materials into new and accessible forms of technology, from television to computers. Often the product of the sexual exploitation of women and children, these materials trivialize prostitution and the commerce of sex in the minds of ever younger populations."

It also referred to:

"... the campaign of terrorism and genocide in Bosnia, which has devastated millions of lives, those of women and children being in the majority. Unofficial figures indicate that as many as 65,000 women were systematically raped as a method of punishing the enemy."

3. And, finally, there are the cases reported to many NGOs of refugee children disappearing, unaccounted for. Investigations, so far, seem to point to kidnapping by criminal elements who provide a "fresh supply" to the sex trade throughout the world.

4. To place these concerns into context, IAF would like to refer to two recent news items. The first concerns the latest hi-tech methods used by sex traffickers in Thailand. The item appeared in The Nation, a Bangkok English-language daily. It noted that after concluding a very profitable financial agreement with the parents of young rural girls, the would-be employers circulated information and photos of their new "acquisitions" to their colleagues in other parts of the world through sophisticated computer networks. Interested buyers would pay several times the initial amount offered to the families of the victims, obviously expecting sizeable profits from their investments. The procedure is highly efficient, and proves, if need be, that sex trafficking has structures similar to any legitimate businesses, with layers of middle men and sophisticated marketing techniques. The second item appeared in practically all the local press in Geneva and refers to a "first" in Zurich: the building of an "official" brothel. Conveniently located near a main highway, it will "employ" 12 prostitutes, tells the Journal de Genève. No one knows yet who will run this new enterprise and it is evident that the good burghers of Zurich have not stopped to wonder whether there might not be financial links between the hi-tech marketing in Thailand (or elsewhere) and the construction of the first "official" brothel in Zurich. And who is to run this conveniently located

"sex parlour"? Are we witnessing the creation of a new category of perfectly legitimate "managers", who in former days may have been called procurers? Questions obviously abound.

5. What precedes is very much relevant to the plea of IAF on behalf of all those who came to share their concern in Bucharest, a plea which, to quote again a resolution of the 31st International Congress of the International Abolitionist Federation,

"... urges the United Nations organisation to adopt the Draft programme of action for the prevention of traffic in persons and the exploitation of the prostitution of others (E/CN.4/1994/71).

"The Draft programme of action lays down measures to be implemented at the national, regional and international levels to deal with many of the points listed (...) among the resolutions of the IAF 31st International Congress. These include (among others) the confiscation of the profits of sexual exploitation and measures for preventing the laundering of money thus obtained."

6. Elaborated by the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery with a strong input from the International Abolitionist Federation, the Draft programme of action for the prevention of traffic in persons and the exploitation of the prostitution of others was submitted to the Commission in 1992 at which time a resolution recommended that it be transmitted to Governments and NGOs for their comments.

7. Three years have since passed. Some comments have come in and, in view of the deteriorating situation throughout the world, the International Abolitionist Federation urges that the Commission take all necessary action to ensure that the Draft programme of action be adopted as soon as possible in order to give Governments useful guidelines to implement the Convention adopted in 1949 on the same issue.

8. We often hear in these august halls that there are many excellent international instruments to cover most human rights abuses but no means of implementing them. The 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others was ratified by over 60 countries. When mentioned, as many other such instruments, it is most likely to elicit a shrug and the comment that "it is very difficult to implement". The Draft programme of action for the prevention of traffic in persons and the exploitation of the prostitution of others gives us a possibility to start the implementation process. It would go a long way in providing strong and clear guidance to deal seriously with one of the most abhorrent affronts to human rights and human dignity: the reduction of the human body to marketable merchandise, an ordinary object in a consumer society.
