

UN EVENT: THE TRADE IN MINORS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: Waking up the World to the Dire Need to Stop Trafficking in Children, Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Pornography

On September 28, 2017, a special high-level event was convened at the United Nations headquarters in New York for a thematic dialogue on “Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Pornography in the Digital Age.” The panelists included a survivor of trafficking, a sitting Congresswoman, and filmmakers dedicated to exposing and combatting the systems, laws, and corporations that enable the heinous crime of child sexual exploitation in the United States and across the world.¹

The event was organized by a [Group of Friends United Against Trafficking](#) and the [Center for Family and Human Rights \(C-Fam\)](#), with former Republican Congresswoman Michele Bachman (U.S. House of Representatives, 2007-2015) serving as moderator.

The objective of this event was to assess the progress made since the implementation of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons adopted by the UN General Assembly on July 30, 2010. As the second high-level meeting on the issue of trafficking in the last six months, there is growing recognition of the urgent need to improve international efforts to combat human trafficking in terms of the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography.

The Global Plan of Action adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2010 reaffirmed Member States’ intent to end the heinous practice of trafficking in persons through cooperative efforts and partnerships, and through prosecutions and victim assistance. Yet findings in 2017 show that the practice is flourishing worldwide:

The widespread and continuing practice of sex tourism, to which children are especially vulnerable, fuels the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The rapid development of the internet and other communication and entertainment technologies resulted in growing

¹ *Speakers:* H.E. Miroslav Lajčák, President of the 72nd session of the General Assembly, H.E. Yury Fedotov, UN Under-Secretary-General, Executive Director, UNDOC, H.E. Andrei Dapkiunas, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, Mr. Omar Abdi, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Rani Hong, Survivor Leader, Head of Tronie Foundation, The Honorable Ann Wagner, US Congresswoman.

Examining the Magnitude of Child Pornography and Sexual Exploitation of Minors via the Internet

Moderator: Mrs. Susan Yoshihara, Ph.D., Senior VP, C-Fam

Panelists: Ms. Camille Cooper, Director of Government Affairs National Association to Protect Children, The HERO Child Rescue Corp, Ms. Mary Mazzio, filmmaker, author of ‘I Am Jane Doe’, Laura J. Lederer, J.D., President, Global Centurion.

Breakdown that Fuels Demand and Rescue and Assistance Programs for Victims

Panelists: Ms. Rachel Moran, survivor leader and founder of Space International, Mr. Benjamin Nolot, President, Exodus Cry, Mrs. Deidre Pujols, CEO/Founder, Open Gate International.

availability of child pornography, including sexual abuse material, pedophilia and other forms of sexual exploitation and abuse of children.²

A representative of Judicial Watch attended this event as an associate member of the UN's Department of Public Information (DPI/NGO) to report on current efforts at the United Nations to expose and prosecute those engaged in the trafficking of persons.³

Trafficking in persons is not limited to sexual exploitation. Other forms of exploitation include child soldiers, forced marriage, forced labor, forced begging, slavery, selling of babies, and removal of organs. Victims of these crimes include men, women, boys and girls.⁴

Nevertheless, as one of the first speakers, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Belarus, H.E. Andrei Dapkiunas, focused the discussion of trafficking in persons on the scourge of child sexual exploitation and child pornography, pointing out the alarming statistic that children compose as much as one-third of all trafficking victims worldwide. And as a result, he urged the UN to keep trafficking in persons at the fore of its agenda.

Next, a short video presentation by Ms. Rani Hong, provided firsthand testimony of the nature and horrors of child trafficking. She told of her ascent from victimhood to survivor – then as an advocate on behalf of those caught in the slave trade today. She was stolen from her family in southern India and sold to a slave master at the age of seven. Within a year, her emotional and physical state had so declined that she was of no value to her captor, and he sold her into illegal adoption. Following her adoption and subsequent recovery, she became “one of the world’s leading voices in the fight against modern-day slavery.” Today she serves as co-founder of the Tronie Foundation and works alongside her husband, who is also a survivor of human trafficking. The Tronie Foundation rewards companies for good behavior with a Freedom Seal – “a visual marker of “freedom” from

² Group of Friends United Against Human Trafficking, THE TRADE IN MINORS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: WAKING UP THE WORLD TO THE DIRE NEED TO STOP TRAFFICKING IN CHILDREN, CHILD PROSTITUTION AND CHILD PORNOGRAPHY, INCLUDING VIA THE INTERNET, Two-Day Special Event, UN Headquarters, New York, September 27, 2017, <http://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/170928pm-trafficking-digital-age-conceptnote.pdf> (accessed Nov 22, 2017).

³Judicial Watch is associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information (UN-DPI) as a nongovernmental organization, whose mission is to promote transparency, accountability and integrity in government, politics and the law. It fulfills its educational mission through litigation, investigations, and public outreach. Its International Program serves as an integral part of its educational program. Since 2001, it has been meeting with delegations from all over the world who participate in U.S. State Department-sponsored leadership programs.

⁴ UNODC, *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2016*, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2016_Global_Report_on_Trafficking_in_Persons.pdf, accessed November 22, 2017.

human trafficking, developed with insights from world thought leaders, supply chain experts and through insights and expertise of approximately 30 major companies across Europe and North America, representing a market cap of one trillion dollars.” Research in the US and the UK has shown that 66 percent of consumers will not buy products when they know human slavery was used in its production. Companies displaying the Freedom Seal have established policies preventing forced labor and when displayed, the Freedom Seal helps raise awareness of and garners support for trafficking survivors.⁵

The next speaker, Congresswomen Ann Wagner, has taken the battle against sex trafficking to Capitol Hill where she has served as representative for Missouri’s 2nd congressional district since 2013. In April of this year, Ms. Wagner, along with a contingent of bipartisan representatives from 14 states introduced legislation to clarify Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (CDA) of 1996. According to Ms. Wagner:

This legislation would make clear that Congress never intended Section 230 to create a lawless internet where bad actors can engage in criminal activity online that they cannot engage in offline. This is already obvious to our State authorities: In 2013, 47 State Attorneys General [called on Congress](#) to amend the CDA to restore jurisdiction to State authorities who are tasked with protecting America’s children.

[This legislation](#) would lift barriers that have prevented the Federal Government, States, and victims of sex trafficking from pursuing justice against America’s modern-day slave markets.⁶

Ms. Wagner told the event participants that very wealthy and powerful forces are organized against the legislation and she was naming names: She reported that Google has been actively funding and supporting legal battles on behalf of Backpage.com in the name of freedom of speech. Due to the wrongful interpretation of Section 230, Backpage has evaded justice across the U.S. for years. The sordid details of Google’s strange alliance with Backpage were reported by Nicholas Kristof in the *New York Times*:

Google has been working behind the scenes for several years to support Backpage in legal cases filed by its victims — some as young as 12 years old — who had been sold repeatedly for sex on the advertising site. The details are horrific, but for those with a strong stomach, Consumer

⁵ Tronie Foundation, “A Global UN Accredited Organization to End Slavery and Human Trafficking,” <http://www.troniefoundation.org/press>, accessed November 22, 2017.

⁶ Press Release, “Wagner Introduces Bipartisan Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act of 2017,” <https://wagner.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/wagner-introduces-bipartisan-allow-states-and-victims-to-fight-online>, accessed November 29, 2017.

Watchdog provides all of the gory details of Google's secret funding of groups supporting Backpage's legal defense against victims [here](#).⁷

There were many different voices speaking out on behalf of the victims of trafficking, as set forth by Dr. Orlandi, a C-Fam, event co-sponsor in her article on the "naming and shaming" of "Purveyors of Child Rape." However, this paragraph stands out for its conciseness in defining the problem, exposing the sponsors, and providing a solution:

[I am Jane Doe](#), by movie director Mary Mazzio and producer Alec Sokolow, highlighted the ongoing battle of American mothers against **Backpage.com**, the website where their children were sold for sex and abuse. **Their legal case is opposed by Google, George Soros and others, but fiercely fought for by Congresswomen Ann Wagner.** "Internet has become a red-light district," Wagner told the audience. The Missouri lawmaker has gained 148 co-sponsors for her bill to amend the 1996 law that gives blanket immunity to websites that sell children. She urged the audience to call their representative in [support](#). (Emphasis mine.)⁸

Much of the information shared at this forum is an open secret. Viewing of pornography is known to have escalated since the advent of the Internet. The sex trade, prostitution, and crimes involving adults are distressing, but have occurred since the dawn of time. However, shocking is not strong enough a word to convey what most must have felt when hearing the following report:

Camille Cooper, Director at [PROTECT](#), shocked the audience with U.S. data on child-pornography. **19% of victims are under the age of three and 80% of child-pornography involves penetration.** "This is what child pornography is about," Cooper said, "not pictures of children taking a bath." (Emphasis mine.)

It is a well-established fact that the viewing of Internet pornography is not a victimless crime. Every person, no matter what age, sex, or race, who is a victim of sex trafficking matters. However, when young children are victims, it creates a whole new urgency in

⁷ *Newsmax*, "Google, Backpage.com and Sex Trafficking," [Christie-Lee McNally](#), September 7, 2017, <https://www.newsmax.com/ChristieLeeMcNally/google-sex-trafficking-backpage/2017/09/07/id/812291/> accessed November 29, 2017. (Nicholas Kristof, "Google and Sex Traffickers Like Backpage.com," *The New York Times*, September 7, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/07/opinion/google-backpagecom-sex-traffickers.html>.)

⁸ C-Fam Center for Family and Human Rights, "Event Names and Shames Purveyors of Child Rape, Trafficking," Marianna Orlandi, Ph.D., September 29, 2017, https://c-fam.org/friday_fax/un-event-names-shames-purveyors-child-rape-trafficking/, accessed January 19, 2018.

finding and prosecuting those who participate in such crimes and in identifying and opposing those corporations and funders who enable such depravity.