

RELEASE IN PART
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From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, July 27, 2009 9:07 PM
To: H
Subject: FW: Cheryl, here is a quick backgrounder on child slavery in Haiti
Attachments: HAITI -- Paper on Restaveks 26JUL09.doc

Text of attachment below:

To: Cheryl Mills, COS
From: Lou de Baca, G/TIP
Re: Child Trafficking in Haiti: the *Restavek* Problem
Date: July 26, 2009

Just before I left for Africa, the Secretary asked that I send you and her a short memo on the *restavek* problem that she could share with President Clinton in his role as Haiti envoy. The Haiti country narrative from the annual trafficking report is also attached to this short memo as an appendix.

I wanted to make sure that you had this before you travel to Haiti this week. I'm also sending over a copy of *A Crime So Monstrous*, by investigative reporter Ben Skinner, who did some undercover work in Haiti on child slavery and in fact negotiated the purchase of a child in just a few short hours. I understand that [redacted] will be joining you for the trip – she has been increasingly active in the slavery/trafficking arena, and is enthusiastic about engaging with us on the issue.

Background

Haitian parents unable to care for their children have traditionally sent them away from home, to relatives or strangers who are expected to provide the children with food, shelter, and an education in exchange for housework. Children given or sold into this system are known as *restaveks*, a Creole term based on the French “*restez avec*” (“stay with”). While some *restaveks* are cared for by their host families and sent to school, most of these children are subjected to years of hardship, abuse, and involuntary domestic servitude. At one time the practice may have benefitted both child and the host family, but for most *restaveks* it is now a modern form of slavery.

The roots of the *restavek* system reach back generations, and mirror involuntary child domestic servitude patterns in West Africa. The practice is so entrenched in Haitian society that it is not limited to the upper classes -- poor families routinely keep one or more *restaveks* who come from even poorer families.

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Estimates from NGOs and the Haitian government of the number of *restaveks* in the country run from 90,000 to 300,000, the majority of whom are girls between the ages of six and 14. NGOs believe another 3,000 Haitian *restaveks* are in the Dominican Republic. Exploited *restaveks* in either country typically work excessive hours on physically demanding tasks without pay or adequate food, do not attend school, and are often physically and sexually abused by their host family.

On average, parents offer their children to host families when they are as young as six. Girls are primarily trafficked into private homes in the city, while boys more often end up exploited for labor on farms.

Restaveks who do not run away or escape usually remain with the host family until they are 14-years old; Haitian labor laws require employers to pay domestic workers over 15 years old, so many host families force *restaveks* out of the household before that age. Abandoned and runaway *restaveks* make up a significant proportion of the large population of children living on the street, where most are forced into prostitution or street crime by violent criminal gangs. The *restavek* system thus has a destabilizing effect far beyond the individuals involved.

Some *restaveks* do escape, and those who are picked up by the authorities are referred to the social welfare organization *IBESR* (*Institut pour le bien-être social et la recherche*), and then temporarily cared for in dedicated shelters. Two centers in Port au Prince receive financial and technical support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to provide shelter, food, medical and psychosocial services for these children until their parents can be found and conditions are in place for the children to return to their families.

The shelter's capacity is limited, however, and the rescued children cannot always return to their families. Since 2005, IOM has only been able to assist about 300 children.

Action Needed:

The permanent demise of the *restavek* system cannot come about without overhauling both the Haitian legal system -- which does not prohibit or punish this form of modern slavery -- and the historical institutions and attitudes which support it.

Some of these changes are already in process, although without long-term international support they are likely to prove fruitless. The UN, USAID, World Bank, IOM, US Institute of Peace, and other reputable organizations currently conduct rule-of-law and legal reform assistance programs that seek in part to revise Haiti's criminal laws, which have been in place relatively untouched since 1826.

Most programs plan to develop a new legal structure that is easy for the general public to understand, fosters trust in the government, and develop a culture of the rule of law. This overall structure could allow for the development of effective specific legislation which not

only prohibits the *restavek* practice in all forms as well as the abuse, exploitation, or enslavement of any child or adult.

Prospects for this specific anti-trafficking outcome, however, may hinge on donors' inclusion of specific goals addressing the *restavek* problem in their broader rule of law and legal reform programs. A parallel donor effort to aid to the Haitian police child protection unit – the Brigade for the Protection of Minors – would boost the Haitian government's capacity to investigate and punish the exploitation of these child slaves.

G/TIP Activities in Haiti

Last month, G/TIP funded the International Organization for Migration (\$315,000) and we are in the process of awarding to the NGO Free the Slaves/Anti-Slavery International a grant of \$200,000 to address the needs of some child trafficking victims. The Free the Slaves project will include the disbursement of micro-grants and training of parents, while increasing public awareness of trafficking and gathering data on trafficking issues in Haiti. This project will partner with the local NGO Fondasyon Limyè Lavi (Light of Life Foundation), which has done groundbreaking work against this practice.

In the past, G/TIP funded the Pan-American Development Foundation, complementing separate funding from USAID, for work in preventing cross border trafficking from Haiti to the Dominican Republic.