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# Adopting the Code: Human Trafficking and the Hospitality Industry

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# Adopting the Code: Human Trafficking and the Hospitality Industry

## **Abstract**

Human trafficking generally and child exploitation in particular is a global problem. While hard data are difficult to obtain in detail due to many unreported and underreported cases, the International Labor Organization ([www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)) estimates that human traffickers earned as much as \$150 billion in 2014, making it financially the second largest illicit crime, surpassed only by the sale of drugs. That same study estimated 20.9 million victims of human trafficking worldwide, with 5.5 million of those being children.

## **Keywords**

Cornell, hotels, hospitality, human trafficking, exploitation, prostitution

## **Disciplines**

Hospitality Administration and Management | Other Sociology

## **Comments**

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Adopting the Code:

# *Human Trafficking and the Hospitality Industry*

*by Michele Sarkisian*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**H**uman trafficking is a worldwide epidemic, affecting vulnerable adults and children for slavery and sexual exploitation. The hospitality industry has become an unwilling participant in human trafficking's modern day slavery machine. This report outlines the dimensions of human trafficking and explains how the hospitality industry can help break the cycle of exploitation. In particular, the report relates the expanding use of The Code, which is a program that unifies the industry against trafficking of children for sexual exploitation.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Michele Sarkisian** is president of P3 Advisors, a company she founded after spending nearly 30 years helping dozens of Fortune 500 companies design and implement strategies to acquire, engage and retain all critical stakeholders to profitably grow business. Her approach is to apply current human sciences insights to sales improvement, employee engagement, and consumer loyalty initiatives so that clients get the best return for their sales and marketing or human resources spending. As an experienced industry veteran, Michele personally consults on all P3Advisors business and each client starts with her personal attention. She is a research fellow of the Center for Hospitality Research.

Adopting the Code:

# *Human Trafficking and the Hospitality Industry*

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**H**uman trafficking generally and child exploitation in particular is a global problem. While hard data are difficult to obtain in detail due to many unreported and underreported cases, the International Labor Organization ([www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)) estimates that human traffickers earned as much as \$150 billion in 2014, making it financially the second largest illicit crime, surpassed only by the sale of drugs. That same study estimated 20.9 million victims of human trafficking worldwide, with 5.5 million of those being children.

## Information sources on ending child trafficking

International Labour Organization: [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

ECPAT-USA: [www.ecpatusa.org](http://www.ecpatusa.org)

National Center on Missing and Exploited Children:  
[www.ncmec.org](http://www.ncmec.org)

Polaris: [www.polarisproject.org](http://www.polarisproject.org)

Streetgrace: [www.streetgrace.org](http://www.streetgrace.org) (includes “Not Buying It” campaign)

Georgia Cares: [www.gacares.org](http://www.gacares.org)

Youthspark: [www.youth-spark.org](http://www.youth-spark.org)

Civil Lawyers Against World Sex Slavery: [www.usclaws.org](http://www.usclaws.org)

Shared Hope International: [www.sharedhope.org](http://www.sharedhope.org)

GBCAT (Global business Coalition Against human Trafficking): [www.gbcat.org](http://www.gbcat.org)

END IT Movement: [www.enditmovement.com](http://www.enditmovement.com)

a21 Campaign: [www.a21.org](http://www.a21.org)

Not For Sale: [www.notforsalecampaign.org](http://www.notforsalecampaign.org)

World Vision: [www.worldvision.org](http://www.worldvision.org)

United Way Worldwide: [www.unitedway.org/featured-programs/end-human-trafficking](http://www.unitedway.org/featured-programs/end-human-trafficking)

National Human Trafficking Resource Center:  
[www.traffickingresourcecenter.org](http://www.traffickingresourcecenter.org)

National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1.888.373.7888

Fight The New Drug: [www.fightthenewdrug.org](http://www.fightthenewdrug.org)

International Justice Mission: [www.ijm.org](http://www.ijm.org)

Unicef: [www.unicefusa.org/mission/protect/trafficking/end](http://www.unicefusa.org/mission/protect/trafficking/end)

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The hospitality industry is dragged into this crime because traffickers often use hotel rooms and common carriers to move and exploit victims. Polaris Project reports that, of the calls its National Human Trafficking Hotline has received from hotels, 92 percent were to report sex trafficking, 5 percent to report labor trafficking, and 2 percent to report a combination of the two.<sup>1</sup> Throughout this article, I offer examples of criminal human trafficking activity that has taken place in hotels. In some cases, alert hotel or food-service staff have prevented further damage, in other cases, police investigators have stepped in.

Trafficking is defined by the exploitation of others, not the movement of them. A person is a victim of sex trafficking

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<sup>1</sup> Polaris Project Report on Human Trafficking and the Hotel Industry: [polaris2014.nonprofitsoapbox.com/storage/hotelindustry.pdf](http://polaris2014.nonprofitsoapbox.com/storage/hotelindustry.pdf)

when they are recruited, transported, harbored, or received by means of threat, coercion, abduction, fraud, deceit, deception, or abuse of power with the goal of prostitution, pornography, violence or sexual exploitation, forced labor, involuntary servitude, debt bondage (with unfair wages), or slavery practices. Any person under the age of 18 in the sex industry is, by definition, a victim of human trafficking. There is no need to show that force, fraud, or coercion was used on children.

**Exploited children.** Looking specifically at children exploited for the sex industry, no one disputes that anyone under the age of 18 involved in sex trafficking has not chosen their situation. While there is evidence that most exploited adults also have not chosen to work in the sex industry, concentrating on children will make a considerable difference to the overall exploitation problem. Victims are typically pulled into the industry at 11 to 14 years old.<sup>2</sup> Once in, it is difficult to get out due to drug addiction, danger to self and family, life-ending disease, poor health, violence, suicide, and lack of support or help. Focusing efforts on eliminating demand and improving prevention while rescuing and helping victims will change the situation.

There is no single scenario that occurs when children are exploited for sex. We have seen many stories about Cambodian children being sold into trafficking by relatives in order to meet financial obligations, but that is just one scenario and one country. There are many situations and many locations. Trafficking also happens in Mexico, South America, the Middle East, Europe, Australia, and the U.S. (as shown on the following pages).

In some cases, families are deceived by traffickers who appear to be good and caring people promising better lives for underprivileged children. Families are tricked into sending their children to “language schools and employment apprenticeships,” only to have them vanish. Foster kids, runaways, and confused or depressed children are recruited by pimps at malls, train stations, bus depots, and right off the streets. Increasingly, victim recruitment takes place online. CLAWS (Civil Lawyers Against World Sex Slavery) and the other organizations listed at left confirm that hundreds of thousands of children are exploited or at risk for trafficking within the U.S. each year.

Unfortunately, children are a tempting target for traffickers. They are easy to lure or kidnap, the earning opportunities are strong due to tremendous demand, and the victims can be sold repeatedly to multiple customers each day. According to CLAWS and Streetgrace, pimps earn between \$25,000 and \$33,000 per week selling sex in Atlanta alone. Girls and pre-pubescent boys are in demand for both pornography and sex.

Most troublesome, penalties for human trafficking have thus far been minimal, at least in the U.S. As one example, until just a few years ago, domestic minor sex trafficking in the state

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<sup>2</sup> According to Polaris, United Way, UNICEF, Wellspring Living, and many other organizations listed above.

of Georgia was a misdemeanor with a \$50 fine (that was also true in many other states). Now, however, this crime in Georgia has been upgraded to felony status, with the prospect of jail time. In that regard, Georgia has made great progress and is one of the first states to implement the “Not Buying It” campaign crafted between the state’s attorney general and Street-grace. Georgia has been sharing its plan with other states’ attorneys general, and it has already been accepted and implemented elsewhere with more reviewing for implementation.

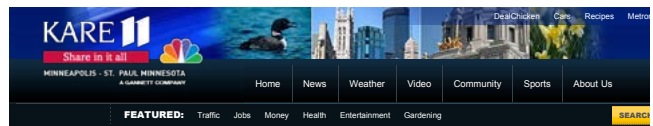
To make matters worse, victims have often been viewed as the criminals—effectively blamed for being exploited—and are treated as such. In some societies, the victim is blamed for being raped, for example, with resulting honor killings considered acceptable punishment. Even in developed countries, including the USA, the abusers (“johns”) are typically given a slap on the wrist. Sadly, many parents, step-parents, and foster parents have been the problem or contributed to the problem by abusing kids, looking the other way while abuse was taking place, not noticing dangerous relationships growing online or elsewhere, not paying attention to the vulnerabilities of children under their care, or, as noted above, outright selling their kids to meet financial needs.

**Online connections.** The internet has facilitated this crime by giving the traffickers access and anonymity. Classified ads online have moved child trafficking off the streets and onto the internet, making it harder to spot. For example, backpage.com, one of the popular sex advertising vehicles carries some 700 ads per day. In 2015, one ad in the Atlanta backpage.com site triggered 181 clicks, and 27 men called or texted interest—in just 90 minutes! Several stings resulting in indictments started with backpage.com-triggered encounters (see examples 2 and 3 on the following pages).

The easy availability of pornography on the web also distorts children’s perceptions and behavior, sometimes even leading to horrific adult behavior. One example is Ted Bundy, whose interview with James Dobson from decades ago describing how he was affected by porn, is still available on the internet. Some of today’s pornographers go so far as buying up seemingly innocent domain names and linking those domains to violent porn sites. This practice, in effect, stalks young boys as they search for unrelated topics, only to find themselves directed to violent porn. In some cases, these adolescent boys systematically become porn addicts behind closed doors at home, at school, or while traveling (see Gail Dines’s TED talk on pornography<sup>3</sup>). The long term implications of viewing violent porn are not entirely known, but early signs are troubling. Violent porn skews a person’s perceptions of what is normal, what is manly, and what is acceptable treatment. One interesting point regarding pornography is that a study in Seattle by Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking (BEST) found that the peak time for procuring sex online is 2:00 p.m. That means

<sup>3</sup> [tedxtalks.ted.com/video/Growing-Up-in-a-Pornified-Cultu](http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/Growing-Up-in-a-Pornified-Cultu).

## Human Trafficking in Hotels, Example 1



### Man gets 21-year sentence for prostituting underage girl

12:33 PM, Jun 6, 2012 | 0 comments



SAMUEL COZART

Recommend Tweet Email Print A A A



ST. PAUL, Minn. - A Columbia Heights man was sentenced to 21 years in prison after pleading guilty to prostituting a teenage girl.

Besides prison time, 39-year-old Samuel Cozart will also have to register as a sex offender.

Roseville Police were called to the Days Inn Hotel at 2550 Cleveland Avenue North in Roseville last January by the manager who suspected a patron was prostituting an underage female.

The manager explained to police that a quick internet check of the defendant's name turned up an escort service known as M.A. Entertainment on www.backpage.com featuring the 17-year-old victim.

After removing both the victim and Cozart from the hotel room, officers confirmed that the teen had been prostituted in exchange for money and methamphetamine. Further investigation revealed that the girl had posted on the website and that she and the defendant were on their way to a prostitution job when police arrived.

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- Man pleads guilty in kidnapping, beating of girlfriend
- Second motorcyclist dies after group crash in Wis.
- Mother, boyfriend charged with toddler's death
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**In this June 2012 report, KARE television, Minneapolis-St. Paul, detailed the arrest of a man at a Days Inn in Roseville, Minnesota. He was accused and convicted of prostituting his 17-year-old victim at the hotel.**

much of the activity is happening while people are at work (likely using company resources). Some corporations are refining human resources policies to align with their humanitarian values by providing negative consequences to employees who use company resources to take part in any sexual exploitation of others, including the purchase of pornography.

I submit that the availability of pornography has influenced society as a whole. We have seen the language of the sex industry become normalized, describing exploiters as “customers, clients, or consumers.” Pimp is used as an everyday verb with terms like “pimp my ride.” Popular songs (e.g., 50 Cent’s “Get Rich or Die Trying”), books, movies, and TV shows (e.g., *50 Shades of Grey*, “Pretty Woman,” “Game of Thrones”) suggest that sexual exploitation is a “victimless” crime and part of everyday life. Normalization of nudity and violent sex on TV, lyrics in songs around abuse of women (often by those who claim to support the end trafficking cause!), popular books including sex abuse, and ads for casual sex aids have changed public perception and reduced pornography’s shock effect.

## Human Trafficking in Hotels, Example 2

**State of Minnesota  
County of Hennepin**

**District Court  
Fourth Judicial District**

CCT	LIST CHARGE STATUTE ONLY	MOC	GOC	CTY ATTY FILE NO.	CONTROLLING AGENCY	CONTROL NO
1	609.322	Z1D81	N	12-4406	MNBCA0000	10000618
2	609.322	Z1D81	N			
3	609.322	Z1D81	N			
4	609.322	Z1D81	N			
5	609.322	Z1D81	N			
6	609.322	Z1D81	N			

COURT CASE NO.                      DATE FILED

if more than 6 counts (see attached)    if Domestic Assault as defined by MS 518B01, sub2a,b

**State of Minnesota,**

**PLAINTIFF,**

VS.

NAME: first, middle, last  
**AKMAL SALEEM KARON**

**DEFENDANT,**

UNKNOWN  
MN

Amended    Tab Charge Previously Filed

SERIOUS FELONY

SUMMONS

FELONY

WARRANT

GROSS MISDM DWI

ORDER OF DETENTION

GROSS MISDM

EXTRADITION

Date of Birth  
**5/7/81**

**MNCIS #:** 27-CR-  
**LE#:** 11-28216

**SILS ID:** 403514

**TRACK** 2539845

**ID:**

### COMPLAINT

*The Complainant, being duly sworn, makes complaint to the above-named Court and states that there is probable cause to believe that the Defendant committed the following offense(s). The complainant states that the following facts establish PROBABLE CAUSE:*

Complainant, Ann Quinn, of the Bureau Of Criminal Apprehension, has investigated the facts and circumstances of this offense and believes the following establishes probable cause:

On May 14, 2010, St. Cloud Police Officers were dispatched to the Best Western Americanna Inn at 520 Highway 10 South in the City of St. Cloud, County of Stearns, State of Minnesota on a welfare check. A Jimmy Johns employee contacted law

The bill of particulars for this 2012 complaint includes charges that the defendant trafficked an underage victim in several hotels, including a Best Western in St. Cloud, a Red Roof Inn in Robbinsdale, and Motel 6 hotels in Fridley, St. Cloud, and Richfield, all in Minnesota. Police had taken custody of the victim after a Jimmy Johns employee became suspicious at the Best Western. However, the victim ran away, and was eventually recovered in a police sting in Houston, Texas. The complaint states that solicitations for prostitution were made on backpage.com.

### How the Hospitality Industry Is Involved

The hospitality industry cannot afford to ignore this crime of exploitation and, in fact, should take steps to end it. As I said above, the sexual exploitation venue of choice is frequently hotels, and the infrastructure of the travel industry makes it easy to participate in and move exploited persons around to attract the most customers. Sixty-three percent of trafficking incidents, according to a 2012 BEST study, happens in hotels.<sup>4</sup> This

includes all types of hotels, ranging from luxury to economy. In a study of sexually exploited children in New York City, 45 percent reported that their exploitation took place in a hotel. The media recently reported that Jared Fogle (former Subway restaurant spokesperson) met with young victims at luxury hotels such as The Ritz-Carlton and The Plaza in New York City (e.g., *The Washington Post*<sup>5</sup>). As seen on these pages, there are many examples of hotel-based exploitation in branded

<sup>4</sup> BEST archive newsletter, October 2013 ([www.bestalliance.org/archive-newsletters.html](http://www.bestalliance.org/archive-newsletters.html)).

<sup>5</sup> See: [www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-wasnt-jared-fogle-charged-with-child-sex-trafficking/2015/09/07/752cb7c2-5566-11e5-8bb1-b488d231bba2\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-wasnt-jared-fogle-charged-with-child-sex-trafficking/2015/09/07/752cb7c2-5566-11e5-8bb1-b488d231bba2_story.html).



**Human Trafficking in Hotels,  
Example 3**

This 2011 indictment accuses the defendants of trafficking an underage victim in numerous hotels in Lubbock, Texas, including a Studio 6, the Tech Inn, the Overton Hotel, and a Red Roof Inn. An undercover police officer arrested the pair at the Overton. The defendants were accused of using backpage.com to offer their victim as a prostitute.

hotels including Motel 6, Best Western, Days Inn, Ramada Inn, Marriott Courtyard, and Hilton. Anyone interested in tracking just how frequently hotel-based exploitation cases come up can simply set Google alerts to regularly receive them. Sadly, one must be prepared for lots of alerts.

Another reason that hotels are involved is that the exploiters often go to a location away from their home city or country to commit their crime. A Norwegian study of men's participation in sex acts, for instance, found that 80 percent of those who paid for sex acts did so abroad. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Americans and U.S. permanent residents account for an estimated 25 percent of child sex tourists worldwide.

In recognition of that fact, in 2003 the U.S. Congress passed the PROTECT Act (Prosecuting Remedies and Tools Against the Exploitation of Children Today), which enhanced U.S. law enforcement against Americans who travel abroad and sexually abuse children. In September 2003, the first arrest under this statute was made in Cambodia. A 69-year-old man was arrested for sexually abusing boys as young as ten. He may have abused as many as fifty children on overseas trips in preceding years.

Hotels are not the only location in use by exploiters. In the U.S., shopping malls are targets for pimps to find teenagers, connecting typically within 45 minutes of a teen's arrival, according to Youthspark. They lure vulnerable boys and girls with modeling contracts and personal charm. Sometimes a runaway or seemingly depressed child is offered a meal or comfort by a man or woman who poses as a caring stranger. Websites, ports,

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS  
LUBBOCK DIVISION

CLERK OF DISTRICT COURT  
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF  
TEXAS  
JUN 1 11 PM 2:00  
DEPUTY CLERK *BJ*

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

CHANZE LAMOUNT PRINGLER (1)  
MEGAN LEE NORMAN (2)

§  
§  
§ No. **5-11CR00040-1**  
§  
§

INDICTMENT

The Grand Jury Charges:

Count One  
Conspiracy to Commit Sex Trafficking of a Child  
(Violation of 18 U.S.C. § 371)

A. OBJECT OF THE CONSPIRACY

From on or about March 9, 2011, through on or about March 30, 2011, in the Lubbock Division of the Northern District of Texas, and elsewhere, **Chanze Lamount Pringler and Megan Lee Norman**, defendants, conspired and agreed with each other, in and affecting interstate and foreign commerce, to commit offenses against the United States, that is, to (a) recruit, entice, harbor, transport, provide, obtain, and maintain by any means, a minor female, knowing, and in reckless disregard of the fact, that the minor female had not attained the age of 18 years and would be caused to engage in a commercial sex act, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1591(a)(1); and

airlines, buses, banks, and other businesses also facilitate the sale and movement of children.

Most of the people buying sex are men, and men are the primary facilitators, although women are also involved in trafficking.<sup>6</sup> There is no single profile of the person seeking exploitive sex.<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that people in all walks of life have been involved in the business of child exploitation, largely due to the substantial volume of money available to traffickers.

<sup>6</sup> C. Atchison, Report of the Preliminary Findings for Johns' Voice: A Study of Adult Canadian Sex Buyers (Canadian Institute for Health Research; British Columbia Medical Services Foundation; and Social Sciences Humanities Research Council); January 2010; retrieved May, 15, 2013; www.johnsvoice.ca/docs/JOHNS\_VOICE\_GENERAL\_RESULTS\_EXECUTIVE\_SUMMARY\_FINAL\_DIST.pdf

<sup>7</sup> Durchslag, R., & Goswami, S. (2008). Deconstructing the demand for prostitution: Preliminary insights from interviews with Chicago men who purchase sex: Chicago: Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation; and C. Atchison, *op.cit.*

## The Code

- 1 **ESTABLISH A POLICY AND PROCEDURES**  
against sexual exploitation of children
- 2 **TRAIN EMPLOYEES**  
in children's rights, the prevention of sexual exploitation, and how to report suspected cases
- 3 **INCLUDE A CLAUSE IN CONTRACTS**  
throughout the value chain stating a common repudiation and zero tolerance policy of sexual exploitation of children
- 4 **PROVIDE INFORMATION TO TRAVELERS**  
on children's rights, the prevention of sexual exploitation of children, and how to report suspected cases
- 5 **SUPPORT, COLLABORATE, AND ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS**  
in the prevention of sexual exploitation of children
- 6 **REPORT ANNUALLY**  
on your implementation of The Code

Ordinary seeming men from all types of professions and stations in life are demanders. According to additional information provided by Youthspark, 25 percent of the men buy one or two times, 25 percent buy yearly, 25 percent buy every few months, 20 percent buy monthly, and 5 percent buy weekly. The median age is 49, 56 percent are married, 24 percent have kids under 18 at home, and 50 percent have higher than median incomes.

### Eliminating Trafficking

Many organizations and individuals are involved worldwide in the effort to end trafficking, including governments, industries (e.g., hospitality, trucking, and music), faith-based groups, communities, schools, business groups such as Rotary International, and chambers of commerce. Three charge-card firms; American Express, VISA, and MasterCard, announced recently that they will no longer accept payments for purchases made from sites notorious for sexual exploitation (such as backpage.com). At this time, however, prevention efforts are duplicated and fragmented with limited global organization and processes, and few restoration opportunities for victims.

To better organize this effort, former President Jimmy Carter joined with Rotary International in May 2015 to conduct

the Summit on Human Trafficking at the Carter Center in Atlanta. Over 250 people gathered from around the world to address the issue, resulting in business, media, and legislation subgroups continuing to work on a number of actions to address both the demand and supply side of trafficking. Other organizations that have recently held anti-trafficking conferences are United Way, UNICEF, and International Justice Mission.

Many organizations are also geared to rescuing victims. For example, ECPAT-USA (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking) is dedicated to children and focused on hospitality. There is also UNICEF, ENDCrowd, IHTI, The Bombay Teen Challenge, International Justice Mission, Truckers Against Trafficking, A21, Wellspring Living, Mercy Ministries, Streetgrace, and United Way. An organization called Fight The New Drug is communicating widely about the troubling consequences of pornography and has created a following on Facebook. However, it takes a lot of effort from a lot of people and organizations to make a difference.

**Stopping buyers.** Although we want to do everything possible to interdict the felons who bring children into sex exploitation, I believe we must focus more attention and action on eliminating demand. We must enforce consequences on buying as well as for trafficking and pimping, or we will continue to have exploitation. One approach that seems to work is the “Nordic Model,” which outlaws buying sex, though not selling sex. Norway, Sweden, and several other countries have seen trafficking decline tremendously since implementing this law.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, legal prostitution, as applied in Germany, for instance, has worsened the trafficking problem. Another effort to reducing demand, “john schools,” which educate buyers of sex on the implications of their actions on themselves and their victims, have shown good results in reducing recidivism. Some communities are implementing “shaming” tactics by publishing names of those who buy sex with children. Publicized stings have taken place at massage parlors and hotels with great success. Reputational risk can be effective at an individual, community, and corporate level, and publishing exploiters is bold and effective in reducing demand.

### Adopting the Code

One of the most promising mechanisms for interfering with exploitation of children is The Code, which is the hospitality industry's responsible tourism initiative ([www.thecode.org](http://www.thecode.org)). The Code is a set of guidelines, policies, and procedures that signers agree are important standards for the industry in its role of preventing exploitation of children. Signers of The Code agree to make every effort to do their part to protect children by creating awareness and offering training to employees and guests. By enacting responsible policies, members of The Code play an essential role in protecting children from sexual exploitation in

<sup>8</sup> See, for example: “New Norway Law Bans Buying of Sex,” BBC News, [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7806760.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7806760.stm).

## Comments on The Code

### Richard Anderson, CEO, Delta

On behalf of Delta and its leadership team, Delta is proud to be the first U.S. airline to sign The Code. We look forward to playing a role in ECPAT's important mission to raise awareness about and combat child trafficking. Delta prides itself on doing what is right, and this is the morally right thing to do.

### Chris Nassetta, President and CEO, Hilton Worldwide

Hilton Worldwide believes strongly in ECPAT-USA's important mission to protect children from sexual exploitation and to bring greater attention to the issues surrounding child trafficking. As part of our commitment, we will work with government, non-governmental organizations, and others in our industry to address this issue.

### David Peckinpugh, President, Maritz Travel Company

We became involved in the fight against human trafficking and the exploitation of children several years ago. The common belief is that this is a foreign issue and not one that has U.S. implications. That couldn't be further from the truth, and human trafficking is occurring in virtually every community across our country. We feel it is our moral obligation to get involved with ECPAT-USA and to build awareness in the hospitality community so that we can bring this crime against humanity to an end.

hotels and other hospitality industry locations. Endorsed by the United Nations and the CDC, among other organizations, The Code is a step beyond the valiant efforts and policies that individual companies have implemented, because it offers common standards, practices, and training that are much more effective than companies' disparate approaches and policies.

As shown in Exhibit 1, The Code comprises six essential steps that will allow like-minded companies to act in concert and to share resources and tools to protect exploited children. It provides guidelines for policies, training resources for staff, contract language for the supply chain, and traveler information for guests to take action if they see something suspicious. Employees of companies that have implemented The Code guidelines cite increased confidence about what to do when they suspect trafficking. They also note a pride in and alignment with their company for taking a stand and living the values the company espouses.

The number one reason for joining The Code is that it's the right thing to do. No other industry has the global reach that the hospitality industry has in terms of identifying exploitation where it is most likely to occur. In the U.S. alone, hospitality employs one of every eleven people who are working, and the global picture is similar. Moreover, the industry has already demonstrated a willingness to mobilize on this issue, and many leaders in the industry already have signed The Code and trained employees. Exhibit 2 highlights reactions of three industry leaders.

**Customers care.** Hospitality customers are also voting against trafficking with their feet and their wallets. In some cases, individuals are choosing different hotels when they find

that their regular hotel has not signed The Code. On a more organized basis, ECPAT provides postcards explaining why the guest would like the property to sign The Code to anyone who requests them. Corporate travel managers are changing their preferred hotels to match their humanitarian values and policies. Some top group travel companies, such as Maritz Travel, now ask their clients about their humanitarian policies. Some organizations limit their hotel selection, even for large group events, to those who have signed The Code. Some companies give and display ECPAT-USA or other anti-trafficking luggage tags to raise awareness and to provide travelers with information about what child sex trafficking looks like and what to do.

As travelers become aware of this situation, they become rightfully appalled and ask what they can do about it and how to influence others. One study conducted by World Vision's Child Safe Tourism arm found that, when asked whether a business's policy to protect children would influence their purchase habits, 94.8 percent of participants said it would. In a similar vein, 84.8 percent of survey participants stated that they would like to know more about how to protect children and prevent exploitation.<sup>9</sup> Almost the same number of participants said they'd like to know more about local customs, appropriate dress and behavior (83.3%), and about ways in which tourists could support the local economy (83%). The same opinions are true in many corporate travel and group travel situations.

I cannot see a downside to a company's signing The Code, and increasingly any downside may come from not signing what has become an industry standard by many hospitality organiza-

<sup>9</sup> See: wvi.org.

tions. There are no legal implications or responsibilities, other than ensuring that a firm will do what it can in terms of making Code-related resources and language available to those directly or indirectly affiliated with their brand. Training implementation is up to the local managers and enforcement to the authorities or parties called upon for assistance.

**Increasing membership.** Hundreds of companies around the world already have signed The Code, including Carlson-Rezidor, Hilton Worldwide, Wyndham Worldwide, Accor Hotels, Sabre, Maritz Travel, Delta Airlines, and Melia Hotels, to name just a few.<sup>10</sup> Soon, non-membership will stand out more than membership as travelers become increasingly aware of this issue and choose to patronize companies that share their values around protecting children.

Marilyn Carlson Nelson, former chair and CEO of Carlson Companies, spurred her travel company to be the first company in the U.S. to sign The Code, saying, “The travel industry has a vital role in combating this scourge.” She also stated:

“There is this growing commitment of business to partner with the public sector and nongovernmental organizations on one of the largest problems the world faces. In our case, we train thousands of people around the world.” She added, “Once you know something, you must ask yourself if you have the courage to step out on this.” Marilyn Carlson Nelson certainly has the courage.

In closing, I urge all hospitality firms to join this movement now. We must ask ourselves whether we are doing everything we are capable of to eradicate trafficking and, if we are not, then close that gap. Meeting with or hearing the story of just one victim of exploitation can be enough to trigger conviction.

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<sup>10</sup> The full list is at [www.thecode.org](http://www.thecode.org).

Trafficking could have been prevented most of the time had someone taken action when there was suspicious behavior.

**Spotting trafficking.** The signs are pretty clear once you know them. Subtle cues include shy, nervous, or timid behavior from a child who looks out of place with the adult accompanying them. Overt cues include branding tattoos, unusual bruises, no luggage with the child, long-hanging “do not disturb” signs, multiple guests entering and leaving a room, and obvious signs in the room that multiple sex partners have visited. All one has to do is make a call to a toll-free number to reach professionals who know what to do. That, and alerting others to do the same, is it. Save one boy or girl from further harm and you are a hero.

Individuals can speak up and change their behavior whenever possible. Here are the possible actions:

- Support companies that have taken action; those who have signed The Code, for example;
- Get familiar with and support resources in your area;
- Volunteer with local agencies;
- Attend Lobby Day when human trafficking issues are on the docket and speak to or write the representatives and governmental officials you have access to;
- Be aware of the victim hotlines and share with others; and
- Finally, if time and resources permit, sign up for an ECPAT-USA Advocacy Journey to Thailand in November 2015. Travelers joining the trip will receive much first-hand knowledge about the issue of child trafficking and what they can do to help.

If not Thailand this year, perhaps another informational trip in the future. ■

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