



Voice of the Chair

By Lisa Kircher Lumbao

Sweden Leads the Fight Against Sex Trafficking

By Rina Jimenez-David

One of the more exciting speakers at the recent conference on "Pathbreaking Strategies in the Global Fight against Sex Trafficking" held last week in Washington D.C., was the Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden, Margareta Winberg.

Former US Congressman John Warner, one of the organizers of the conference, said that when they were discussing the line-up of speakers, one of their consultants said that "if you're really looking for pathbreaking strategies, then you can't overlook Sweden." And as Winberg's talk illustrated, many exciting initiatives not just in the fight against human trafficking, but in righting gender relations as well, are indeed taking place in Sweden.

Since the 1940s, said Winberg, Sweden has "worked to improve the conditions of women... We are now actively pursuing a specifically feminist analysis and approach to gender inequalities."

Winberg made no apologies: "Yes, you heard me correctly. Sweden has a feminist government." Every one of their ministers, including the Prime

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Minister, she said, undergoes gender sensitivity or awareness training.

Before making any decision, she added, government officials have pledged to ask themselves, "In what way will this affect women, and in what way will it affect men?" "We intend quite simply, with gender mainstreaming as our method, to change the power structures that bind and restrict us to traditional gender power relations..."

Sweden truly takes a pathbreaking approach on how it defines prostitution, and how it is linked to trafficking.

"It is very obvious to us that there is a very clear link between prostitution and trafficking," asserted Winberg. "Without prostitution there would be no trafficking in women."

Why the need to make explicit what would seem an obvious conclusion? Because elsewhere in the world -- but especially in Europe -- various groups, including feminist organizations, have sought to delink trafficking from prostitution, insisting that while trafficking is a crime that must be eradicated, prostitution is simply a line of work and a "choice" that must be respected.

But according to Swedish authorities, "prostitution is a form -- a serious form -- of male violence against women." Said Winberg: "Many men see it as their 'natural' right to be able, in return for payment, to exploit women and children, mostly girls, for their own pleasure. Some do it secretly, others openly brag about it and are not at all ashamed of their actions."

Far too many men, noted Winberg, "see women as objects, as something that can be bought and sold."

So while previously the debate over prostitution and trafficking tended to focus on the women and the reasons they are drawn to and remain in the trade, Winberg said increasingly there is recognition of "where the true problem lies -- it lies with the buyers, the customers, the men."

Added Winberg: "Unless we dare to get to the heart of the problem, we will never be able to solve it. We would merely be curing the symptoms, that is, 'taking care' of the victims, the women. Which would mean that men could continue to exploit women and children."

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In practical terms, it means that the customers, the "johns," in street parlance, would be considered equally criminal as the prostitutes. Sweden is the only country in the world so far to enact such a statute.

That is why, said Winberg, Sweden recently enacted a law prohibiting the "purchase of sexual services," where "it is no longer permitted to buy another human being for prostitution purposes."

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Consider present Philippine law on prostitution. Under the law, the only criminal among the various parties involved in an illegal "sex-for-pay" transaction (including the client, the pimp, the club owner) is the prostitute. And under Philippine law, only a woman can be a prostitute.

Contrast this attitude with the

(Continued on page 4)

Manila Women's Forum

The Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women.

It provides opportunities to build friendships, to talk to women of various cultures, and to share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join. The current officers are **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair, Programs, Treasurer, and Newsletter.

Penny Poole, Programs, Newsletter.

Beaulah P. Taguiwalo, Newsletter.

Cost of membership is P300 per year.

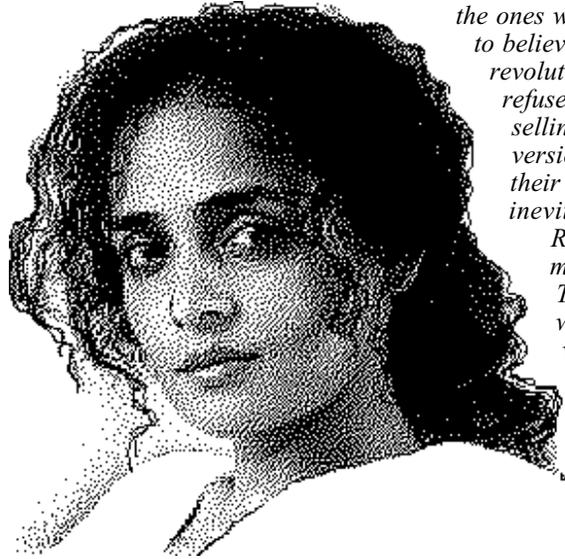
Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. Please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 818-2887 or 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com for more information about MWF.

Women's
Voices
Women's
Faces

Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness - and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we're being brainwashed to believe. The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling - their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability.

Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them. Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.

Arundhati Roy
Porto Alegre, Brazil
January 27, 2003



BpT 2003

Arundhati Roy. This woman from the developing world has said it all.

Excerpts from "Confronting Empire" and other articles

"The only institution in the world today that is more powerful than the American government is American civil society."

The Coalition of the Bullied and Bought consists of governments, not people. More than one third of America's citizens have survived the relentless propaganda they've been subjected to, and many thousands are actively fighting their own government. In the ultra-patriotic climate that prevails in the US, that's as brave as any Iraqi fighting for his or her homeland.

While the "Allies" wait in the desert for an uprising of Shia Muslims on the streets of Basra, the real uprising is taking place in hundreds of cities across the world. It has been the most spectacular display of public morality ever seen.

Most courageous of all, are the hundreds of thousands of American people on the streets of America's great cities - Washington, New York, Chicago, San Francisco.

The fact is that the only institution in the world today that is more powerful than the American government is American civil society. American citizens

have a huge responsibility riding on their shoulders. How can we not salute and support those who not only acknowledge but act upon that responsibility? They are our allies, our friends. ♦ ♦ ♦

Bush's tactless imprudence and his brazen belief that he can run the world with his riot squad... has achieved what writers, activists and scholars have striven to achieve for decades. He has exposed the ducts. He has placed on full public view the working parts, the nuts and bolts of the apocalyptic apparatus of the American empire. ♦ ♦ ♦

It's become clear that the war against terror is not really about terror, and the war on Iraq not only about oil. It's about a superpower's self-destructive impulse towards supremacy, stranglehold, global hegemony. The argument is being made that the people of Argentina and Iraq have both been decimated by the same process. Only the weapons used against them differ: In one case it's an IMF chequebook. In the other, cruise missiles. ♦ ♦ ♦

Contracts for the "reconstruction" of Iraq we're told, in discussions on the business news, could jump-start the world economy. It's funny how the interests of American corporations are so often, so successfully and so deliberately confused with the interests of the world economy.

While the American people will end up paying for the war, oil companies, weapons manufacturers, arms dealers,

and corporations involved in "reconstruction" work will make direct gains from the war. Many of them are old friends and former employers of the Bush/ Cheney/Rumsfeld/Rice cabal. Bush has already asked Congress for \$75bn. Contracts for "reconstruction" are already being negotiated. ♦ ♦ ♦

What can we do?

We can hone our memory, we can learn from our history. We can continue to build public opinion until it becomes a deafening roar.

We can turn the war on Iraq into a fishbowl of the U.S. government's excesses. We can expose George Bush and Tony Blair - and their allies - for the cowardly baby killers, water poisoners, and pusillanimous long-distance bombers that they are.

We can re-invent civil disobedience in a million different ways. In other words, we can come up with a million ways of becoming a collective pain in the ass. When George Bush says "you're either with us, or you are with the terrorists" we can say "No thank you." We can let him know that the people of the world do not need to choose between a Malevolent Mickey Mouse and the Mad Mullahs. ♦ ♦ ♦

Arundhati Roy wrote The God of Small Things.

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Sweden Leads.... (From page 2)
philosophical (and dare I say moral) underpinnings of Sweden's law. "We have clearly recognized that women and girls are not commodities and that the men who treat them as such should be criminalized," said Winberg. "It is the purchasers, that is, most often the men, who are committing a criminal act. According to our point of view, the women -- the prostituted women -- should not be regarded as criminals. Their actions are viewed from a social

The World's Need

So many Gods,
so many creeds,
So many paths
that wind and wind,
When just the art
of being kind
Is all this
sad world needs.

"Just the art of being kind"
Ella Wheeler Wilcox
November 5, 1850 - October 30, 1919

Now that you have
touched the women
you have struck a rock,
you have dislodged
a boulder,
you will be crushed

Women's Freedom Song
South Africa, August, 1956

perspective. They should be offered education opportunities, health care if necessary and support, allowing them to lead a life with a job that allows them to make an adequate living without having to be sexually exploited... Prostitution is one of the most serious expressions of the oppression and discrimination of women; largely upheld by the economic and social structures of society."



The new global "war" against trafficking, Winberg cautioned, faces obstacles arising from a backlash against women and women's rights that manifests itself in three areas: deteriorating economic conditions that have affected women the worst, the rise in the international drug trade that uses trafficking of women as an adjunct enterprise, and the growing influence of fundamentalism in various forms and across religions.

Of the last, Winberg says "Religious forms of fundamentalism... affect the situation of women and girls in a negative way and encroach upon their rights... They are joining together in their opposition to women's rights, in their unwillingness to provide resources for women's reproductive health and in their opposition to the right and access to abortion and contraceptives."

In other words, to fight trafficking, you must fight *for* and *with* women and women's rights, including reproductive rights.

From the Philippine Daily Inquirer, March 5, 2003.

"Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. The cost of one modern heavy bomber is this: a modern brick school in more than 30 cities. It is two electric power plants, each serving a town of 60,000 population. It is two fine, fully equipped hospitals. It is some 50 miles of concrete highway. We pay for a single fighter with a half million bushels of wheat. We pay for a single destroyer with new homes that could have housed more than 8,000 people. This, I repeat, is the best way of life to be found on the road the world has been taking. This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron."

-- Republican President and Five Star General Dwight D. Eisenhower

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