

# Antitrafficking Policies in Asia and the Russian Far East: A Comparative Perspective

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**Abstract:** Russia is currently the largest source country for trafficked women. Increases in unemployment after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the devaluation of the ruble, and a rise in organized crime have created a climate conducive to trafficking, especially in the impoverished Russian Far East (RFE). Many women are lured into trafficking rings by promises of legitimate work abroad, uninformed of the day-to-day activities that their job will entail. This article examines the trafficking situation in the RFE and its Asian neighbors. It focuses specifically on the role of women's organizations in antitrafficking efforts in China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia. Analysis reveals that grassroots women's organizations are the lynchpin in Korea's successful antitrafficking policy. These organizations most effectively address the social and economic factors that make women vulnerable to traffickers. Funding women's organizations and encouraging civil society development must be a part of antitrafficking policy in the Russian Far East.

**Key words:** human trafficking, nongovernmental organizations, prostitution, Russia, Russian Far East

**H**uman trafficking is one of the most compelling issues of the new millennium and has inspired activism by a diverse range of individuals and government agencies. Efforts by the United States and the United Nations have resulted in the passage of antitrafficking laws in many countries, but have failed to ensure that these laws are effective and enforced. Although this macro-level engagement is important, it deals with the effects of trafficking and not with its prevention. Grass-

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roots activities that focus on empowering women economically, socially, and politically are the best ways to minimize women's vulnerability to traffickers. Women's organizations are the lynchpin in successful antitrafficking efforts, as in South Korea. That model is a product of the Korean women's movement and emphasizes the essential role of women-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in antitrafficking work and the importance of government institutions working in conjunction with such organizations to achieve effective results. In this article, I argue that the Korean model is a necessary one for the Russian Far East (RFE) to implement. Areas in the RFE included in this study are Amurski Oblast and Khabarovskii and Primorskii Krai. Funding and supporting women's NGOs must be at the core of any antitrafficking policy in this region.

### **Popular Measures Used to Fight Trafficking**

A comprehensive study of the official material available on human trafficking reveals that recommended solutions are often insufficient, contradictory, narrow in scope, and culturally irrelevant. Although many of these proposed solutions are well intentioned, it is rare to find one that is comprehensive, multifaceted, and culturally sensitive.

The U.S. Department of State's annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report is a major source of information on the state of trafficking worldwide. The report categorizes countries into three tiers, with tier three being the lowest. Tier placement is supposed to be contingent on a country's efforts to actively address the trafficking issue. After the issuance of the third report in 2003, a country's placement at the tier three level was supposed to carry ramifications for their eligibility to receive nonhumanitarian U.S. aid. The 2004 report established a fourth category, labeled the "Tier 2 Watch List."

Activists, such as those working for human rights, international, and humanitarian organizations, are critical of the politicized nature of the State Department report, arguing that countries deserving of a tier three rating are often granted a tier two status, or now a spot on the tier two watch list, as a diplomatic gesture. The addition of the watch list significantly discredits the report as a serious enforcement mechanism and reinforces the perception that the rankings are politically and diplomatically motivated. The tier two and watch list categories appear to be catch-all ranks for countries such as Japan, Russia, Nigeria, and others that are clearly lagging in their antitrafficking efforts, but are too politically important to risk funding cuts or too powerful to join the ranks of tier three countries like Bangladesh and Sudan.

### **Border Control and Visa Regulation**

Increased border security and stricter visa regulations are common ways to deal with the trafficking problem. There is evidence to support claims that porous borders and ambiguous visa categories make a trafficker's job easier.

The steady rise in trafficking over the past several decades, despite an equally steady tightening of visa regulations, indicates that this method alone is not effective. Restrictive visa and immigration policies often exacerbate trafficking prob-

lems, as they raise the risk posed to women due to the more extreme measures that traffickers then take to transport them across borders. Stricter visa regulations also mean that people who want to immigrate legally, but cannot do so under these stricter laws, may be forced to resort to illegal means of entering a country, increasing the value of a “skilled” trafficker.

Visa policies along the Far East border between Russia and China—one of the most porous in the world—indicate why visa regulation alone is not effective. Visa-free zones exist here to encourage economic cooperation, but consequently ease the ability of traffickers to move women between the countries. The much-needed economic benefits of these zones mean that they will likely remain, leaving channels open for traffickers. Border guards are also often easily bribed, making visa or border regulation an unreliable form of trafficking prevention.

### **Criminalizing Trafficking and Traffickers**

One of the most popular methods employed to fight trafficking is the passing of legislation that criminalizes trafficking and traffickers. Three of the four qualifications for meeting the “minimum standards” outlined in the TIP report are concerned with legislative and criminal code adjustments.<sup>1</sup> Although not an effective solution alone, establishing criminal statutes designed specifically for traffickers is a first step toward combating the problem.

A top-down legislative approach is not viable by itself, as it assumes an effective governmental framework, a strong legal system, and the reliable local enforcement of national laws. Legislation also fails to address the issue of police complicity in aiding traffickers. Evidence indicates that law enforcement officials are often directly involved in the trafficking problem, whether by procuring illegal documents, accepting bribes, or using the services of trafficked women. In a 2003 interview, Svetlana Zhukova, a legislator in the Khabarovsk regional parliament, estimated that “the average company that engages in trafficking nets \$100,000 a month, of which 50 to 70 percent goes to Russian government entities for licenses and bribes.”<sup>2</sup> Even if not bribed, the police often claim ignorance of the trafficking problem or choose not to pursue potential traffickers either out of indifference to the problem or a lack of resources. When law enforcement officers do try to prosecute traffickers, they often find it difficult to obtain evidence to prove that a trafficking crime has been committed. Finally, legislation often does not address the social issues, such as economic instability, poverty, and domestic violence, that are the underlying stimuli for people to seek work abroad.<sup>3</sup>

### **Legalization of Prostitution**

The legalization of prostitution has been proposed as a means of reducing the number of women trafficked. The Thailand-based Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women and the Prostitutes Education Network support this idea. From the perspective of these activists, any limitation on a woman’s right to have complete control over her body is deemed a limitation of her fundamental human rights.

The debate over legalization in Russia raged in 2001 and 2002, deeply polarizing the NGOs and political community. The antilegalization cohort, supported

by Presidents Bush and Putin, won the battle. The 2004 TIP report adamantly defines the U.S. position on legalization: "The United States Government takes a firm stance against proposals to legalize prostitution because prostitution directly contributes to the modern-day slave trade and is inherently demeaning."<sup>4</sup>

Evidence suggests that legalizing prostitution could actually increase the number of trafficking victims or increase the risk posed to them. Further, analysis of recent trends in trafficking networks operating in Europe indicates that traffickers are moving their victims underground to avoid regulated brothels.<sup>5</sup> Janice G. Raymond, the co-executive director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, explains that claims for improved health and quality of life for prostitutes made by prolegalization advocates are overrated. Women are also reluctant to identify themselves as prostitutes for fear that the label carries a permanent stigma.<sup>6</sup> In a system of regulated prostitution, trafficked women may be seen as a source of cheaper and riskier sex.

### **Fighting Organized Crime**

Combating organized crime is one antitrafficking strategy.<sup>7</sup> This approach is particularly emphasized in the Russian Far East, where organized crime networks are growing exponentially with cooperation among the Chinese Triad, Japanese Yakuza, and various Russian gangs. The 2004 discovery of seventy-two women in an underground shelter near Vladivostok prompted criminal proceedings against a local crime group. Police confiscated more than \$500,000 and forged travel documents intended to get the women out of Russia.<sup>8</sup>

Linking trafficking with organized crime is important, but runs the risk of giving the impression that all traffickers are members of the mafia and that all mafia networks work together and are created equally. This perception could intimidate local law enforcement officials from pursuing trafficking rings out of fear that large-scale reprisals await. Finally, crime groups can only survive as long as there is a source of women willing to risk working abroad or family members willing to sell their daughters.

Although many of these plans make important contributions to the trafficking effort, not one can stand by itself as an effective method.

### **Regional Analysis**

The Russian Far East's proximity to Asia, a region notorious for sex tours and prostitution, means that women from the Far East risk involvement in the well-established and highly efficient trafficking networks that can land them in such distant locations as Malaysia, Israel, and Egypt. The nuances and importance of the RFE's trafficking situation are best understood in the context of its regional position as Russia's gateway to the east. Therefore, it is instructive to examine the role of women's organizations in the fight against trafficking in China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia. Additionally, an examination of the impact of antitrafficking efforts in these countries shows the pluses and minuses of each country's policies. These attempts at analysis go beyond the State Department's often superficial country profiles to show the complexities of the region's situation.

## China

China has consistently received a tier two ranking from the State Department, although women are trafficked to, from, and through the country. Despite the country's minimal efforts, women trafficked to the country are at an extremely high risk for violence and exploitation.<sup>9</sup> The proliferation of prostitution and domestic violence and the government's inability or lack of desire to deal with it raise the risk of exploitation for foreign and local women.

The 1990s was a decade of reform in China, with significant achievements made in developing a more transparent legal system and steering the economic structure to accommodate capitalism. Nevertheless, prostitution is on the rise. Attempts at social change actually resulted

in a breakdown of protections for women's rights.<sup>10</sup> In 2003, the State Department estimated that as many as ten million people in China were involved in prostitution.<sup>11</sup> "Exotic" prostitutes from Russia and Southeast Asia are available at high-priced bars and brothels.

Corrupt law enforcement officers and government officials are a barrier to combating prostitution and trafficking. Officials are bribed by pimps or brothel owners or offered perks when they themselves visit the brothel.<sup>12</sup> These actions indicate the silent encouragement of prostitution and, intentionally or not, trafficking. Prostitution is an embarrassment to the Communist Party, which touts its ability to eliminate social problems. Party officials often opt to just avoid the issue.

Prostitution is just one of the issues pertinent to women in China. Others, such as economic inequality, sexual harassment, and domestic violence, are central to the discussion of women's status in society. The Chinese women's movement grew out of the official Communist Party's organization, the All China Women's Federation (ACWF), founded in 1949. Largely ineffective, the federation was all but absent from public discourse from the 1950s until the 1980s. Activism by Chinese NGOs and by the ACWF increased somewhat after the U.N. Women's Conference during the 1980s and even more after the U.N. Women's Conference was held in Beijing in 1995.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, strict regulation by the government continues to stifle the movement's effectiveness and limit its ability to tackle controversial issues.

Currently, the Chinese women's movement gives some attention to the spread of commercial sex and trafficking. In the days leading up to International Women's Day, 2004, the ACWF and the United Nations Children's Fund distributed brochures and videos to women, explaining how to avoid becoming a trafficking victim. These efforts were primarily targeted at Chinese women.<sup>14</sup> Women's groups are credited with bringing the problem to the gov-

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ernment's attention, organizing educational activities, and obtaining funding from UNICEF.<sup>15</sup>

There are numerous barriers to the effectiveness of the women's movement and civil society development in general in China. After Tiananmen Square, the government is suspicious of any grassroots organization and makes it difficult for organizations to function. For example, an organization can only be licensed if its activities are not duplicated by another organization in the same region.<sup>16</sup> One article cites a 2000 study, showing that the country has 1.45 NGOs for every ten thousand Chinese, an organization-to-citizen ratio lower than India or Brazil.<sup>17</sup>

## Japan

Japan had consistently received a tier two rating in the 2002 and 2003 TIP reports until it was demoted to the "Watch List" in 2004. It was again bumped back up to the tier two level in 2005. The country has a thriving sex industry, which is of particular concern because women from less-developed countries associate its high standard of living, strong economy, and "developed" status with safety and prosperity—making them, perhaps, less cautious about accepting employment offers there. Further, the Japanese government's unwillingness to address the issue has meant that the few antitrafficking measures in the country have resulted from pressure by NGOs. In response to Japan's 2004 demotion, the government passed an antitrafficking law in March 2005 and is supposedly committed to addressing the issue. Although Japan's actions are admirable, I remain skeptical that these efforts are largely cosmetic and that the State Department hastily rewarded a country that has demonstrated little commitment to the issue.

The Japanese women's movement lacks issue focus and cohesion and is not an effective force for change in the country. Cooperation between Japanese and Korean women's organizations in the early 1990s on the issue of "comfort women" seemed like a sign that the women's movement would begin to embrace more controversial topics. However, activists were not successful in translating their experiences into an effective local movement to address the issue of violence committed by U.S. troops stationed in Okinawa. After the 1995 rape of a twelve-year-old girl, Japanese women organized protests and established "Okinawan Women Act against Military Violence," which devotes itself to researching the impact of the bases on women and children. Unfortunately, the group has not garnered widespread public or governmental support.<sup>18</sup>

A few women's groups are making attempts to address the trafficking issue. The HELP Asian Women's Center has set up the Japan Network against Trafficking in Persons.<sup>19</sup> The limited scope of the coalition's work, the inability of the group to raise public outrage over trafficking, and the government's ambivalence toward the problem do not bode well for its future efforts.

It is not just women's organizations that find it difficult to function in Japan. Keiko Hirata notes that NGOs receive no legal protection from the government, making them vulnerable to funding shortages and other problems.<sup>20</sup> Hirata is confident, however, that NGOs are fashioning a new type of politics in Japan, and NGO activities have created a challenge for domestic governance.<sup>21</sup> Despite this

optimistic assessment and the potential for civil society development in the country, the government's unwillingness to listen to activists and the community's reluctance to tackle controversial issues make the reality of civil society development less positive.

### **The Republic of Korea**

Korea's antitrafficking policies are the most progressive in the region. This is largely due to the well-organized women's movement that has forced the Korean government to recognize it as a legitimate political and social force and to cooperate with activists to implement gender-sensitive and progressive policies. The Korean women's movement is committed to addressing the issue of trafficking as part of its broad-based push for social and political change in the country.

The Korean women's movement can trace its roots to the labor movements of the 1970s, but it emerged as a cohesive and formidable force during the democratization process in the late 1980s. Women activists have successfully adapted their agenda to the needs of Korean civil society by addressing a broad range of issues from the traditionally female realm of the domestic to more politically controversial topics. The diversity and unity within the women's movement separate Korea from Japan and China and provide a model for effective and sustainable advocacy.

The most successful campaign led by the women's movement and the most pertinent to trafficking is the effort to gain restitution for Korean "comfort women." Military "comfort stations" were set up near Japanese bases from 1932 to 1945 and employed tens of thousands of Korean women to serve the sexual needs of soldiers.<sup>22</sup> Seeking redress for these women has been a major rallying point for the movement. The international coalition created to address the issue is a great credit to the organizing potential of Korean feminists. The government, which had been complicit in much of the sexual exploitation of women in the country, was initially dismissive of the movement's efforts.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, in the early 1990s, both Korea and Japan acknowledged the issue; the debate continues over the amount of compensation to be awarded.

The issue of "comfort women" is still a powerful one for Koreans. Activists have directly linked the exploitation of women during World War II with the current use of women to entertain the nearly thirty-seven thousand American GIs stationed in Korea. These women are often dubbed "modern-day comfort women" and include both Korean and foreign women, primarily from the Philippines and Russia. At a 2002 consciousness-raising concert sponsored by women's groups, surviving "comfort women" were honored and activists spoke out against the trafficking problem.<sup>24</sup> The link between these two groups of "comfort women" is so strong that when discussing the women employed near U.S. military bases, the media uses the word *wianbu*<sup>25</sup> to describe both groups.<sup>26</sup>

In connection with stationing troops in a foreign country, the U.S. government establishes a bilateral Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which usually specifies that the host country will exclude American soldiers from prosecution under the host country's laws.<sup>27</sup> Many Koreans view these SOFAs as a source of justification for the improper conduct of soldiers and as a source of state-sponsored

exploitation of women by both the Korean and U.S. governments.<sup>28</sup> Influenced by activists, the Pentagon proposed an amendment to the manual on courts-martial in September 2004, specifically forbidding the patronizing of prostitutes by military personnel. The move is cited as an effort to curtail soldiers' support of trafficking in places such as South Korea and the Balkans. It is not clear, however, whether these proposed changes to the manual will actually be made.<sup>29</sup>

Local men also form a wide market for the thousands of trafficked women brought to Korea. Cheng Sea-ling conducted interviews with Korean men about their experiences with prostitutes, and all expressed interest in having sex with a white woman, either out of curiosity or some sort of national pride, as evidenced by one of her informants' graphic description of "sticking the Korean flag pole (on a foreign land)."<sup>30</sup> It is estimated that there are ten thousand to thirty thousand Russian women employed in Korea's sex industry.<sup>31</sup>

The Republic of Korea has been a tier one country since 2002, a dramatic jump from its tier three ranking in 2001. The Korea government protested the 2001 report and made efforts to meet the minimal requirements needed to improve their status.<sup>32</sup> The women's movement was not content with these primarily cosmetic adjustments and pressured the government to make broader systemic changes and to address the cultural and social factors associated with trafficking.

Although the country is still both a source of and market for trafficked women, the government and women's organizations are making significant and effective efforts to address the problem. Together, they create public awareness campaigns to educate police and other law enforcement officers about trafficking and to help officers identify victims. This cooperation between the government and women's organizations was recently highlighted in the 2005 TIP report.

In response to a petition by a million Korean women, the R.O.K. passed two significant anti-prostitution and anti-trafficking laws in 2004 aimed at combating the commercial sex exploitation of women and girls. The laws not only stiffened penalties for trafficking and prostitution, established support mechanisms and facilities for victims, and provided for public awareness and education campaigns, but also reflected the input of the NGO community and the government agencies charged with responsibility and enforcement. . . . The government's efforts have produced a visible reduction in the commercial sexual exploitation of women and girls and markedly raised public awareness of trafficking and prostitution.<sup>33</sup>

NGOs, in cooperation with the government, publish information in Filipino and Russian languages about the risks of trafficking, distribute multilingual hotline ads in bars, and support the opening of numerous health centers and shelters to serve potential victims.<sup>34</sup> Activists consistently expose clubs that exploit women and force a response from the government.<sup>35</sup> Kim Kang Ja, the chief of police in Seoul and the first female to hold this position, vigorously pursues traffickers and frequently inspects entertainment facilities for abused women. She is described as "a national heroine" for focusing police attention on dealing with the sex industry. Kim attributes her position as police chief and her success in fighting the sex trade to her direct contact with women's groups and civic organizations.<sup>36</sup> The police have published studies on the number of women involved in Korea's sex



industry, cooperated with international organizations to work on antitrafficking measures, and secured funding from the Korean government to help facilitate their work.<sup>37</sup> Their efforts seem to be working. Since the outreach campaigns began, more Russian women are seeking help from the Korean police.<sup>38</sup>

The Ministry of Gender and Equality was also created in large part from pressure by women's organizations. The ministry is active in developing methods to combat trafficking.<sup>39</sup> The ministry places flashing ads on the "Seoul searching" Web site, a site devoted to events in the city, warning potential tourists about trafficking and listing various government and private support centers.<sup>40</sup> Successfully securing both Western and Korean funding and effectively cooperating nationally and internationally on projects, gender issues and women's concerns are now at the forefront of national and international politics and also prominent in the public dialogue.

### **Russia and the Russian Far East**

Russia received a tier two ranking in 2003, a step up from its 2001 and 2002 tier three status, but was demoted to the "Watch List" in 2004 and 2005. The 2003 upgrade was the result of the Duma's consideration and subsequent passage of adjustments to the criminal code, which make prosecuting traffickers easier, of small-scale public awareness events, and of President Putin's stated commitment to combating the problem.<sup>41</sup> Despite Putin's vocal condemnation of trafficking, it is unclear how adamantly he will push for the enforcement of antitrafficking laws, given his focus on eliminating corruption, fighting terrorism, and encouraging international investment in the country.

Russia is notorious for its police corruption, an opaque and minimally functioning legal system, and a certain willingness by its populace to circumvent the law for personal gain. Russia's 2004 demotion indicates that elite-level pronouncements have not translated into broad-based reform. Government corruption, Moscow's disconnection from much of the country, and public apathy are some of the key barriers to top-down solutions. The grassroots Russian women's movement, attuned to the needs and nuances of local peoples and politics, represents a potential source for realistic change and can play a critical role in combating trafficking.

To get a true understanding of what the women's movement means in Russian culture and society, it is important to look briefly at the social revolution that took place during and after Gorbachev's perestroika. Women and men embraced the new freedoms allowed by glasnost and perestroika in different ways. Some opted for embracing change privately in their everyday lives, whereas others took to organizing and creating NGOs and activist groups to help negotiate these new freedoms. Both genders experienced a sexual revolution. Sex and freedom became explicitly linked as the Soviet Union fell apart.<sup>42</sup> During perestroika, pornographic video clubs, prostitution, open homosexuality, newspaper articles about sex, and beauty contests became public expressions of the newly allowed freedoms. These expressions were appreciated by many, but also caused great anxiety in the population. Young people coming of age during perestroika embraced these sexual freedoms. However, their Soviet education, which lacked

any sex education, left them ill prepared to confront the physical and emotional consequences of having multiple partners and unprotected sex.<sup>43</sup>

Some viewed the new images of scantily clad women in advertisements and beauty pageants as tools for women's empowerment, whereas others saw them as a method of exploitation.<sup>44</sup> The prostitute emerged as a symbol of the open attitude toward sex—she was beautiful, feminine, sexually empowered, and independent. In a 1990 survey, young Soviet women ranked prostitution eighth among the top twenty professions, and more than one-third of high school girls said that they would trade sex for hard currency.<sup>45</sup> Sex was one of the most visible, easily attainable, and profitable commodities in the new economy. This was no doubt

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disturbing both for sexual purists and those who feared the “corrupt” capitalist ideology. Despite the existence of prostitution during the Soviet period, its mass scale is often blamed on glasnost and perestroika, which brought it out of the easily ignored “public houses” and into the street.

Understanding the social and cultural attitudes toward sex and the perestroika sexual revolution are critical to understanding the issues and attitudes associated with trafficking in Russia today. It is especially important to recognize the psychological association between sex and freedom for both men and women and why this may create obstacles for antitrafficking activists. Western feminism as a political movement was generally rejected by Russian women because of its association with bourgeois values or because people were simply opposed to taking part in any social movement after years of ideological participation.<sup>46</sup>

Understanding the social and cultural attitudes toward

Another consequence of the chaos and economic decline of perestroika was a dramatic increase in the number of women trafficked from the former Soviet Union. The sexually charged and economically unstable postcommunist period, combined with new independence and willingness for adventure, made many Russian women easy prey for traffickers. Women's groups that emerged during this period were forced to confront the ideological contradictions between conceptions of international prostitution as a liberating feminist phenomenon and perceptions that it is an oppressive and degrading risk for women. The general population is slow to feel outrage over trafficking. One Far Eastern newspaper noted that most citizens think that women's own “stupidity” allows them to fall into a trafficker's trap.<sup>47</sup>

According to Aleksandr Kolesnichenko, the majority of women do not know that they will be forcibly involved in prostitution. A study of women in the Maritime Territory who had worked as sex slaves in Japan, Korea, and China showed that only a quarter of them had had any notion of where they were going before they left. The rest had been promised jobs as housemaids, dancers,

cooks, sales clerks, or even advertising agents. But on their arrival, all were forced into prostitution.<sup>48</sup>

Although most scrolling television ads for young women have been eliminated in Moscow and St. Petersburg, they continue to run daily on television stations in the RFE, flash on the Internet, and fill local newspapers. According to journalist Bryon MacWilliams, seventy-three companies in Khabarovsk recruit approximately two thousand young women every year to work abroad, and approximately 25–35 percent of these women are college students. He described a Khabarovsk sign: “Downtown, a white poster with blue lettering has been glued to the wall of a building off from Komsomolskaya Square. It reads: ‘We are offering work in South Korea and Greece to girls (18–29 years old) as dancers, hostesses, girl-models (from 16 years). Salary begins at \$800 per month.’”<sup>49</sup>

What little antitrafficking work has been done in Russia has been undertaken by NGOs. Nearly all of the leading antitrafficking organizations are members of the St. Petersburg-based Angel Coalition. Founded by the MiraMed Institute, the Angel Coalition is a Moscow-based consortium of Russian NGOs. Western scholars and activists are heavily involved in the strategic planning for the coalition. MiraMed Institute, Human Rights Watch, and Winrock International have conducted surveys to investigate not only people’s attitudes toward trafficking and prostitution, but also citizens’ relationships to law enforcement.<sup>50</sup>

The women’s movement is part of the third sector of Russian society, civil society, which is at great risk of being silenced by the government. What civil society does exist survives largely due to international funding. Therefore, Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink’s “boomerang model,” which states that repression may actually move activists into international arenas to obtain support for their movements, is particularly applicable in the context of the Russian state.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, international funds are often the only steady source of money for Russian NGOs.

The rise in the number of woman-oriented NGOs in Russia in the 1990s and the great number of NGOs supported by Western funding prompted several leading scholars to assess critically the viability and true nature of these women’s organizations. Sarah Henderson and Valerie Sperling argue that Western funding has created “pathologies” in the women’s movement, breeding civic elites devoted to Western guidance and ultimately undermining the grassroots civil society development.<sup>52</sup> Critics also argue that activists in Russia’s women’s movement have no loyalty to a single issue and instead choose issues based on the availability of funding or the guidance of Western organizations.

Sperling’s and Henderson’s work is extremely important, as it brings to light many of the pressing problems that plague the women’s movement in Russia and ultimately plague civil society in general in Russia. Their observations are perceptive, astute, and reflect an accurate snapshot of the burgeoning civil society in the early postcommunist period. As the millennium dawned and Western organizations began pulling out of Russia, many Russian NGOs were unable to sustain themselves and collapsed, proving the claims that these organizations were not independently viable. Despite Sperling’s and Henderson’s accurate predictions and analysis, their observations often do not reflect the current nuances of

NGO operations in the country. Not only is the analysis heavily focused on organizations in the western part of Russia, but it also seems to underestimate the ability of women's organizations to accept Western money without letting them dictate the day-to-day operations of the organization or even to cause a major shift in issue focus. For example, during my time in the RFE, I observed that many organizations would operate on a grant-to-grant basis, adjusting the language of their applications slightly to meet the criteria of the specific grant. Although the specific grant may expand the services of a particular organization, I observed that it very rarely caused the leaders of the organization to neglect their original focus or target group. In fact, the grants simply allowed these organizations to learn about and to work on a broader range of issues that fit well within their ideological focus.

Although Sperling and Henderson are extremely critical of Western funding and the West's desire to mold Russian civil society, their work does not go so far as to argue that funding to these organizations should cease or that Western support for civil society should be abandoned. Additionally, despite Putin's general hostility toward NGOs, he seems willing to accept and support their involvement on the issue of trafficking. At the January 2004 gathering of leaders from eighty-three NGOs, his spokesman delivered an address on his behalf in which Putin expressed his hope that the conference "will unite the efforts of government bodies and nongovernmental organizations and will help solve this problem."<sup>53</sup> Putin's support stems in part from the fact that most antitrafficking efforts are not threats to his political strategy, as they often require a stronger state. Indeed, Putin's post-Beslan governmental reforms, which promise state funding to human rights organizations, indicate that he is willing to embrace organizations that serve his vision for Russia.<sup>54</sup>

Now, more than ever, the United States must actively support and encourage civil society development. The rise of authoritarianism in Russia precludes the likelihood that it will develop on its own, meaning that the advance of *any* civil society must take precedence over theoretical debate about whether it is "real" or "artificial." In a May 2004 op-ed, Stephen Schmida, regional director of the Eurasia Foundation's Russia program, outlined the necessity of supporting NGOs and civil society development in Russia. He explained that with the failure of the "Liberal Project" in Russia and the rise of Putin's oppressive "Statist paradigm," it is more important than ever for the West to engage with Russia.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Underdeveloped Russian Far East**

The RFE lags behind the western regions of the country in everything from health to economic development to NGO activism. Lack of Western investment, fewer foreigners, a small and shrinking population, and geographic isolation from Moscow and Europe mean that the RFE has not been able to establish itself as a place of economic or social influence. The paucity of organizations focused on trafficking in the RFE also means that awareness at all levels of the issue is lower than in the more cosmopolitan west. Not only are there fewer NGOs here, but those that do exist are less experienced and less connected to the West. Local gov-

ernment action is minimal, police corruption remains high, and local officials remain uncooperative and even hostile toward addressing the issue. Despite these negative trends, trafficking is increasingly receiving attention from some members of the local government, women's organizations, and international funding agencies. This is evidenced by the filing of the first criminal case by Khabarovsk officials against traffickers in February 2005.<sup>56</sup> In a press release, the spokesman for the MVD noted that the office of the public prosecutor in Khabarovsk had identified five women who had been trafficked and who were willing to provide official evidence against one of two groups accused of trafficking. Of forty cases brought against traffickers in Russia, two have been filed in the RFE.<sup>57</sup>

Notably, Winrock, in conjunction with the United States Agency for International Development, established the Trafficking Prevention Project (TPP) in an attempt to involve the region in the increasingly expanding network of women's organizations involved in combating trafficking. TPP was funded through a two-and-a-half-year grant based in Khabarovsk, serving Siberia and the RFE. The grant ended in May 2004, but many of its activities continue under another grant, which runs until 2006. The TPP project provided funding to twenty-nine Russian NGOs to conduct trafficking prevention activities including job, entrepreneurial skill, and self-esteem training for girls and women, as well as psychological, legal, and career services.

It is difficult to quantify the success of the program, but its impact can be evidenced by the fact that during the course of the grant period, more newspaper articles appeared about trafficking, television news began airing stories about trafficking, and one local station even conducted its own undercover investigation in a Japanese club. A Khabarovsk theater agreed to run a fifteen-minute movie before feature films titled "The Story of One Return." Created by a local filmmaker and activists, the film was produced by Winrock. The black-and-white film with voice-over narration relays the tale of a young woman's decision to leave Russia for Korea and details the psychological and social issues that she confronts after her ordeal, and also instructs women on the dos and don'ts of international work.<sup>58</sup> Winrock also funded the creation of several billboards that warn about the risks of trafficking.

Grantees met with each other several times a year at Winrock conferences and e-mailed one another frequently to share ideas and strategize prevention projects. Without the financial and logistical support from Winrock, these interactions would not have taken place. Select grantees were also able to attend an antitrafficking conference in Helsinki where, for the first time, they could meet their colleagues from western Russia and other countries.

Activists in this region are keenly aware that trafficking in the RFE takes on different forms than in the West and that women here face unique risks. Women in the RFE are clearly more exposed to Asian trafficking routes, but also remain vulnerable to being trafficked through Moscow to Europe. The cost of a plane ticket to Korea or Japan from the RFE is approximately the same as a ticket to Moscow. Activists here must be equally engaged with their western and eastern counterparts.

Amurski Oblast is one region in the RFE where women are at a particularly high risk for trafficking, especially in the oblast's capital, Blagoveschensk. Blagoveschensk, which is just across the Amur River from China, is home to one of the largest universities in the RFE and therefore has a large population of young female students desperate to cover the rising cost of tuition. Young women can often earn good money by traveling back and forth across the border to buy and sell goods. Traffickers utilize the women's familiarity with and proximity to China to recruit them for summer jobs as hostesses or dancers in the country, promising that the students can cover a whole year's tuition with their earnings. Although it is not clear how many of these summer jobs end with the women being trafficked, it is clear that these women face very real danger in China. In 2001, seven women from the oblast died at the hands of their traffickers while working in China.<sup>59</sup> In response to the increasing number of these types of stories, the women's business organization Imidzh began working on antitrafficking projects in Amurski Oblast. The organization has forged a relationship with the local administration, which resulted in the publication of statistical information on trafficking. A meeting of city officials and antitrafficking activists also resulted in recommendations for future cooperation between the administration, NGOs, and the media to combat trafficking.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the efforts of organizations such as Imidzh, a 2003 story of trafficking violence in the region demonstrated not only the continuing problem, but the apathy toward the issue. In December of that year, two women made a dramatic escape from a Chinese brothel to Russia across the frozen Amur River to Blagoveschensk. They had been lured to China as "hostesses" and then beaten and forced into prostitution. The women, who had run over the ice-covered Amur in their sneakers and sweatshirts, were questioned by the police for crossing the border illegally and released to their families with a minor fine.<sup>61</sup>

Several NGOs in Primorski Krai are attempting to fight trafficking. Tsunami is an excellent example of an NGO successful in reaching both the public and the local administration. Its antitrafficking efforts are funded by Winrock International. Tsunami conducts prevention programs that focus on job training and résumé writing and has inspired numerous newspaper articles focused on trafficking.<sup>62</sup> An interview with the director, Svetlana Bazhenova, appeared in the local journal *Marketing and Consulting*, which detailed the organization's trafficking prevention work and the problem in general.<sup>63</sup> Tsunami has also organized roundtable discussions with local officials and law enforcement officers—most notably a 2002 gathering sponsored by the governor of Primorski Krai, S. M. Darkin, that focused on the potential for government and NGO cooperation.<sup>64</sup> Two other local activists and trafficking experts in Primorski Krai recently published a book, *Ussuri*, which details their research on trafficking in the region.<sup>65</sup>

One positive sign of NGO unity on the issue came with the March 2004 "First All-Russia Assembly of Nongovernmental Organizations Against Trafficking in Human Beings." The meeting included members of leading NGOs and members of the Interior Ministry.<sup>66</sup> NGO activism is especially important in the more distant regions of the country, such as the RFE, where federal officials have far less direct supervision and influence.

### Conclusion

NGOs committed to women's issues are best equipped to address the problem of trafficking. They are committed to improving women's lives through education, increased access to employment, and greater political protection. Those women's NGOs that are engaged specifically in antitrafficking work focus on trafficking prevention, on providing women with alternatives to seeking work abroad, or on educating them to make responsible and informed choices when accepting an international job. They also provide psychological services to women who have returned after being trafficked and work to educate the public about the issue. These measures could reduce the number of women who put themselves in the hands of traffickers, and will generally improve women's lives.

The impressive accomplishments of the Korean women's movement are proof that this method works. Due in part to Western encouragement and funding, along with women's own desire for change, a strong women's movement has developed in the country despite initial governmental and cultural

opposition. Women's groups rode the tide of democratization and have become a sustainable and influential part of the burgeoning civil society in the country, constantly challenging the naturally authoritarian tendencies and gender stereotypes of the government. Evidence of the developing symbiosis between the government and women's groups is most clear in their impressive antitrafficking efforts. The country's tier one ranking could justify contentment with the status quo, but the government's willingness to respond to public pressure and to evolve new policies and approaches to dealing with the problem is a sign of their true commitment to ending trafficking.

The Russian Far East is an important region in which to implement the Korean model and to test its effectiveness and international applicability. The region's high-risk location in Asia demands that concentrated efforts are made to stem the flow of women across its borders. In the RFE, foreign assistance is essential to sustaining the existing NGOs, cultivating new ones, and bringing the NGO community together with governmental organs. Foreign assistance will also allow NGOs in the region to develop their ties with their colleagues in Europe and Asia, especially with antitrafficking activists in Korea.

Putin's support for the issue is a hopeful sign that he will pursue more serious antitrafficking efforts. Because trafficking is such a compelling issue, Putin will win favor with the international community if he follows through on his antitrafficking rhetoric. With human rights groups critical of his actions in Chechnya, positive progress on trafficking may help to boost his tarnished reputation. Embracing NGOs is not only the most cost-effective approach to antitrafficking

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***“Foreign assistance will also allow NGOs in the region to develop their ties with their colleagues in Europe and Asia, especially with antitrafficking activists in Korea.”***

efforts for the overextended government, but also the most politically astute way to support civil society development in the context of the Putin regime.

Women's organizations will continue to carve out a space for themselves and develop Russian civil society and continue to improve the lives of women. Those that focus specifically on trafficking prevention will offer alternatives to women that will not only discourage them from risking work abroad, but will encourage them to become active and educated members of society. Their educational sessions and information awareness campaigns will also temper the "success stories" told by women eager to recruit other women into the trafficking ring. Although this will not stop all women from becoming victims, it will at least allow women to make more informed decisions about their employment. In the long and short term, women and society in general will benefit greatly from the work done by these organizations.

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