

70,000 Brazilians Are Prostitutes Overseas. Police Busts a Little Gang in Spain

Contributed by Francesco Neves
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There are 70,000 Brazilian women working as prostitutes in Japan, Europe and South America. Most of them were tricked and ended up doing a job they didn't wish to do and paying dearly for it. Often they arrive at their new working place burdened with debts that may take them years to pay off.

Human traffic is a serious problem all around the world. According to a new report by the UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund, 2.4 million people, 80% of them women, are victims of human traffic. From those, between 600,000 and 800,000 are trafficked outside their homeland.

The UN report says that human traffic turns over every year between US\$ 17 billion and US\$ 18 billion. Among illicit activities, only drug trafficking and weapons trade are more profitable.

Tânia Cooper Patriot, the UNFPA representative in Brazil, praised the Brazilian government for creating the National Policy of Combating Peoples Traffic.

"The advantage of such a policy is that it will bring more attention to traffic prevention and to sanctions against those people involved. It has several dimensions, and one of them is also a greater visibility for these problems and the communities' sensitization regarding the subject,"

Patriota notes that many women victimized by traffickers are stripped from their documents making the task of fleeing or appealing to authorities much harder. As for domestic helpers, she no observes, they are not protected by labor laws. The UN report says that only 19 countries have laws in the books protecting maids and other domestic workers.

The Madrid Connection

In a joint operation called Castela and Madrid with the Spanish police, the Federal Police of Goiás, in the Brazilian midwest, arrested 16 prostitutes and 19 other people belonging to a gang specialized in sex exploitation.

According to the authorities, the Spaniard Aquilino Gonzáles was the chief of the gang in Spain. In Brazil, Maria Corina Fernandes led the operation. The investigation started in January 2005.

Police chief Luciano Ferreira Dornelas, who coordinated the investigative work, told reporters the authorities version of the story:

"The gang enticed 50 women in Goiânia and the cities of Jussara and Minaçu, in the countryside. The sex exploiters got 800 (about 400 dollars) for each woman they were able to send to Spain. The women were taken to Spain with the promise of getting up to 350 reais (about US\$ 150) a day turning tricks in one of the two clubs controlled by Iglesias: the M2, in Leon, or the Clube Las Ninfas, in Ourense."

The girls couldn't leave Europe before they paid the big debt they didn't even know they had before arriving in Spain. "They arrived in Spain owing the gang's boss four thousand euros (US\$ 5,000) each. The sex exploiter paid for everything including the passport and the plane ticket. And then they were subject to sexual exploitation."

Iglesias was arrested in the Cumbica international airport, in São Paulo, while trying to evade arrest by the Spanish police. Maria Corina Fernandes, better known as Karen was arrested in Goiânia. Her daughter, Mônica Fernandes Chaves is a fugitive, being sought for the same crime.