

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Kosovo: Trafficked women and girls have human rights**

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*"We were his property he said. By buying us, he had the right to beat us, rape us, starve us, and force us to have sex with clients."*

*"Even when it was cold weather I had to wear thin dresses... - was forced by the boss to serve international soldiers and police officers."*  
Testimonies of trafficked women and girls.

Despite some positive measures, trafficking of women and girls remains a disgraceful human rights abuse in Kosovo. The international community is responsible for the growth of a sex-industry based on the abuse of trafficked women, said Amnesty International at a press conference revealing the result of its research into the trafficking of women and girls in Kosovo.

"Women and girls are sold into slavery. They are threatened, beaten, raped and effectively imprisoned by their owners. With clients including international police and troops, the girls and women are often too afraid to escape and the authorities are failing to help them," said Amnesty International.

The report, *"So does that mean I have rights?" Protecting the human rights of women and girls trafficked for forced prostitution in Kosovo*, reveals that trafficked women and girls are exposed to a series of human rights abuses, including abduction, deprivation of liberty and denial of freedom of movement, torture and ill-treatment, including psychological threats, beatings and rape.

Young women and girls, often vulnerable because of economic deprivation or for having already been physically abused, are easy targets. They dream of a better life which the traffickers use when they offer them "work" in the West. Instead of getting a proper job the women and girls find themselves trapped, enslaved, forced into prostitution.

According to reports the number of establishments in Kosovo where trafficked women and girls may be exploited has increased from 18 in 1999 to over 200 in 2003. At the same time, the number of prosecutions for trafficking offences remains low.

"Having escaped one set of human rights abuses, trafficked women and girls are subjected to a second set of violations at the hands of traffickers. If they manage to get away, they are often subjected to a third set of violations, this time by the authorities," Amnesty International said.

Despite some positive measures by the authorities to combat trafficking in Kosovo, trafficked women and girls are often still treated as criminals - prosecuted for being unlawfully in Kosovo, or charged with prostitution following raids by UNMIK police. When arrested, the women and girls are not given the basic rights guaranteed to all detainees. They are not informed about their rights, they are not allowed access to a lawyer and girls are often interviewed without a legal guardian present.

Amnesty International found that the UN Interim Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the NATO-led international military force in Kosovo (KFOR), and the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Kosovo (PISG) have failed to protect and respect the human rights of these women and girls.

Members of the international community are estimated to constitute 20 per cent of the people using trafficked women and girls and they generate a significant part of the industry's income.

"It is outrageous that the very same people who are there to protect these women and girls are using their position and exploiting them instead - and they are getting away with it. It has devastating effects on these girls' and women's lives," said Amnesty International.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned that girls under 18 make up between 15 and 20 per cent of the women working in bars. They are suspected of having been trafficked for forced prostitution. Instead of removing these girls, registered by UNMIK, they are left in the bars, subject to further human rights abuses, including being raped and beaten.

Although trafficked women and girls are able to receive assistance from local NGOs and international organizations, Amnesty International is concerned that UNMIK have failed to implement an administrative directive that would guarantee them access to redress and reparation. The organization also reports that few women receive the long-term protection they need, such as witness protection for those prepared to testify in proceedings against their traffickers.

"Trafficking of women and girls in Kosovo and other post-conflict situations will never end as long as the perpetrators go free and as long as civilian and military personnel are allowed to commit human rights violations with impunity," said the organization.

Amnesty International calls on the Kosovo authorities, including UNMIK and PISG, to implement measures to end the trafficking of women and girls to, from and within Kosovo for forced prostitution. The authorities should also ensure that measures are taken to protect victims of trafficking, and to afford them the right to redress and reparation for the human rights abuses they have suffered.

The organization also called on the UN and NATO to implement measures to ensure that any members of military and civilian peacekeeping forces suspected of criminal offences associated with trafficking are brought to justice.

Trafficking of persons, in particular women and girls, in situations that amount to enslavement is included among the most serious crimes in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

For the full report visit **news.amnesty**: <http://news.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur070102004>

**Amnesty International is running a global campaign to end violence against women. For more information and news related to the campaign "Stop violence against women" visit:**  
<http://news.amnesty.org/mav/actforwomen>

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