

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COHN TESTIFIES BEFORE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

IJM Senior Vice President of Justice Operations draws attention to importance of aftercare, capacity building at House hearing

WASHINGTON DC – October 18, 2007 – IJM Senior Vice President of Justice Operations Sharon Cohn was called on to testify at the House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing “International Trafficking in Persons: Taking Action to Eliminate Modern Day Slavery.” The Foreign Affairs Committee, chaired by Rep. Tom Lantos (D- CA), heard from expert witnesses as its members prepared legislation to reauthorize the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Fellow witnesses included Ms. Barbara Shailor of the AFL-CIO trade union federation, the Right Reverend Monsignor Franklyn M. Casale, President of St. Thomas University and Chair of the Human Rights Institute of the St. Thomas School of Law, and trafficking survivor Ms. Zipora Mazengo.

Cohn shared recent photographs of the young girls rescued from forced prostitution in Svay Pak, Cambodia through IJM intervention in 2003. When these girls – the youngest of whom was only five years old – were rescued four years ago, they had been subjected to extreme sexual violence and repeated rape. However, through intensive physical and mental health services, a safe home and loving caregivers, these girls are now thriving. Cohn highlighted the girls' progress, demonstrating to the committee that, though aftercare services are a long-term and resource-intensive investment, they are critical to the rehabilitation of trafficking victims.

Cohn also testified on the value of capacity-building trainings IJM has provided around the world as local authorities work to reduce trafficking and protect vulnerable individuals from victimization in forced labor and forced prostitution. Cohn was questioned by the committee regarding legislative solutions to combat trafficking, and emphasized the importance of measuring and tracking perpetrator convictions and sentencing in U.S. information-gathering on international trafficking, rather than simply documenting perpetrator arrests.

Following the hearing, Rep. Lantos, along with co-authors Rep. Smith (R-NJ) and Rep. Conyers (D-MI) and nine co-sponsors, introduced the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2007, legislation to reauthorize and amend the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. The bill, H.R. 3887, was reported out of the House Foreign Affairs Committee with unanimous bipartisan support on October 23.

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About International Justice Mission

International Justice Mission is a human rights agency that secures justice for victims of human trafficking, bonded labour and other forms of violent oppression. IJM lawyers, investigators and aftercare professionals work with local governments in 12 countries to ensure victim rescue, to prosecute perpetrators and to strengthen the community and civic factors that promote functioning public justice systems.

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