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INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION RECEIVES \$5 MILLION GRANT TO FIGHT SEX TRAFFICKING

Bill & Melinda Gates funded project to focus on communities where human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation is a significant problem

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - March 14, 2006 – *Washington, DC* – Human rights organization International Justice Mission has received a \$5 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to create a replicable model for combating sex trafficking and slavery. The initiative, named Project Lantern, will allow International Justice Mission to open a new office in a community affected by trafficking. Where trafficking flourishes, victims are at greater risk of infection with the HIV/AIDS virus. IJM will develop a model for working with local law enforcement officials in fighting trafficking in that community that will then be shared with stakeholders in the anti-trafficking community to be replicated around the globe.

The global plague of sex trafficking is massive in proportion. The United Nations reports that one million women and girls are newly trafficked every year. In addition, the lack of choice that these victims have over their sexual activity, together with poor living conditions, violence, lack of protection, and no access to health care, all combine to create an increased vulnerability to contracting the disease. Only *rescue* from their illegal captivity will fully ensure that current victims are protected from HIV/AIDS. Successful prosecution of the perpetrators of these crimes will result in a reduction of the overall number of victims of trafficking, in turn decreasing the number of new HIV/AIDS cases.

“Traditional HIV prevention efforts are focused on helping people avoid high risk sexual encounters, but there are millions of women and girls who don't get to make choices about their sexual encounters and are left utterly unprotected from the disease,” said Gary A. Haugen, president and CEO of IJM. “Project Lantern will provide hope and a model for success.”

Helene Gayle, director of HIV, TB, and reproductive health at the Gates Foundation, said, “The global sex trade not only violates human rights, it also fuels the spread of HIV. Efforts like Project Lantern are urgently needed to help fight sex trafficking and save lives.”

International Justice Mission has years of proven effective experience working with local law enforcement and other partners to arrest and prosecute traffickers and others involved in the business of human trafficking. With the funds provided through this grant, the organization will research various regions with high reported rates of sex trafficking, and then identify one region in which to start operations. The office will commence full operations for three years, including undercover investigations, law enforcement training, engagement and involvement, victim rescue, ensuring appropriate aftercare and seeking perpetrator accountability. At the end of these three years, IJM aims to have created a successful model that other governments and organizations may replicate in their communities.

Why Project Lantern:

The name “Project Lantern” was chosen because a lantern was a symbol of hope and freedom during the period of the Underground Railroad in the antebellum United States. Slaves looked for illuminated lanterns, strategically

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placed by a network of supporters in front of “safe houses,” along the road to freedom. Similarly, Project Lantern strives to light a safe path towards freedom for victims of modern-day slavery.

To schedule an interview, contact Emily Nichols: news@ijm.org, 703.465.5495

For ongoing updates on the project, visit www.ijm.org

About International Justice Mission:

International Justice Mission is a human rights organization that rescues victims of violence, sexual exploitation, slavery and oppression. A multi-national team of law enforcement professionals and a highly qualified legal staff conduct criminal investigations and collect evidence to rescue victims and bring perpetrators to justice. IJM works to ensure victims have access to quality aftercare that meets their broad and complicated needs. The work of IJM has been featured on Dateline NBC, FOX News, MSNBC, CNN, and in *Forbes*, *the New York Times Magazine*, *the Wall Street Journal* and other media outlets.

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