

Solidarity of Asian Women Against Prostitution Tourism

ON September 9, 1981, Indian newspapers reported that sex tours were taking a heavy toll of the lives of elderly Japanese *men!* This report was typical of the way in which the exploitation of women is obscured by the male-oriented media. In fact, Japanese men have for years been responsible for the degradation of thousands of Filipino, Malay, Thai, South Korean and Taiwanese women who are forced by poverty to sell themselves for meagre sums of money to the wealthy tourists from "developed and industrialized" Japan.

One instance of such sex tours: on May 24, 1979, Japanese employees of the famous Casio Computer Company were taken on a pleasure trip as a reward for having sold more than their quota. They were lodged in Manila and provided with Filipino women—all at the company's expense. The tourism industry in the Philippines has expanded in the last decade to become the fifth largest industry in the country. In 1976, 75 per cent of tourists to the Philippines came for pleasure trips and 70 per cent of them were male. Annually, about 200,000 Japanese come to the Philippines. 90 per cent of these are males. Bars, sauna baths, night-clubs have sprouted all over Manila. Women are usually included in a package deal in tourist arrangements and usually the girl gets only 15 to 20 per cent of the fee paid by the client.

Related to tourism is the presence of foreign, mainly American troops, who spend their rest and recreation days in US military base areas of the Philippines.

Filipino women pay with their health and their lives for the continued existence of these US bases. Olongapo town, where the Subic Bay Naval Base is situated, is also the home of 16,000 prostitutes and several thousand illegitimate children of American servicemen. Olongapo has



been a recreation ground for American men ever since the days of the Vietnam war. Apart from the social and economic exploitation, women are also violently treated, subjected to harmful sexual perversions, and even killed if they refuse to engage in these perverted acts. Customers can inflict physical torture on the girls.

In the last year, Japanese, Filipino, Malay and Thai women have begun to unitedly campaign against prostitution tourism. The Japanese women's stand is that prostitution tourism is the result of exploitation of less developed countries by developed countries and exploitation of women by men. They write: "We felt a nationalistic hatred towards American soldiers whose rudeness and arrogance was by the strength of the dollar and by their military power. Now, backed by their strong economic power, Japanese men in Asian countries do on an even larger scale what the American soldiers did in Japan in the past. How can we allow to do so?"

In 1979, the women's university in Japan sponsored a series of sessions where Women studied the origins and history of prostitution southeast Asia. After this, the women began their campaign. They appealed to international opinion through the press, sent pamphlets overseas, particularly to Asian sisters in the countries where prostitution tourism is rampant. They raised the issue at the international women's conference in Copenhagen in 1980, but unfortunately women from the affected countries were unable to attend the conference due to economic and political pressures. In November 1980, an anti-prostitution tourism meeting was held in Tokyo, the meeting, women held a demonstration, sang songs, distributed leaflets and staged a play: "The military in civilian clothes - ugly tourists in Manila."

During Japanese prime minister Suzuki's tour of southeast countries, Japanese and Filipino women intensified their campaigns and presented him with several lists of demands. The Japanese government was made to feel uneasy, so after Suzuki's return to Japan, one travel agency was warned and penalized for having organized prostitution tours. However, Japanese women feel that

making a scapegoat of one company will only obscure the real issues and will not end to the tours. They plan to put pressure on the government to control the many big travel agencies involved in sex tour operations.

The mass media gave publicity to the women's campaign and many men responded by making obscene phone calls and writing abusive letters. Even so-called intellectuals made shameless comments like "Prostitution helps women in poor countries" and "Don't deprive a poor soul of his only pleasure. He is forced to work so hard at the company."

Filipino women activists, many of them radical Christians working and living with prostitutes in poverty-stricken slums, are also active around the issue. They have exposed the fact that the money retained by Filipino women selling their bodies actually goes back to Japan! Japanese men fly in on JAL, stay in Japanese hotels, are escorted by Japanese guides, eat in Japanese restaurants, and spend nights with Filipino women. The actual amount of money retained by the women is only one-fifth to one-tenth of what is paid as the prostitution fee to the organizers of the tours—this is the structure of exploitation!

Perhaps the most positive feature of the anti-prostitution campaign is the unity which women from the exploiter and exploited countries have managed to achieve. While fighting Japanese imperialism, Thai women sent a telegram of support to the Japanese women, saying; "Let's fight together." As the Japanese women put it: "We believe that each of us can share the pain, anger and tenderness of women as we are all women being discriminated against throughout the world." A wave against prostitution tourism has begun to spread outward from the Philippines. The seven-year campaign by Filipino women against sex tours by Japanese men to South Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand and other Asian countries, has been responded to by Asian sisters. This is the beginning of international solidarity of Asian women.

—summarized from three reports in
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Against U.S. Nuclear Bases

ON March 15, eight women from Diego Garcia island in the South Pacific started a hunger strike in Mauritius. They were protesting against the British government who expelled 1,700 families from Diego Garcia for military purposes, between 1967-1971. They also demanded that the Mauritian government make representation to the British government. On the twelfth day of the hunger strike a demonstration was held in Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius. The demonstrators were met by armed police, and several women were badly injured. As a result of the protests, eight women were tried on July 23 and 30. They were charged under the Public Order Act which means they face obligatory prison sentences. Most of the women are Diego Garcians and two of them are involved in the Muvman Librasyon Fam (the women's liberation movement).

When granting Mauritius its independence in 1968, Britain demanded the right to buy Diego Garcia for three million pounds. The British "cleared out" the inhabitants of Diego Garcia—who now live in extreme poverty ill-adapted to life in a city slum—so that they could lease the uninhabited island to the U.S. government for a military base.

During the last hunger strike the Mauritian government finally agreed to send a delegation to Britain. It included Charlesia Alexis (one of the women due for trial on July 23) and arrived in London on June 27. The British government offered them the insulting sum of £2 million and demanded they renounce their rights to Diego Garcia.

The women's movement in Mauritius is alone in demanding "Full compensation; the U.S. nuclear base out of Diego Garcia and the re-unification of Diego Garcia with Mauritius." Other groups involved in the struggle are willing to compromise. It is difficult for the MLF to maintain their stand as they are being attacked on all sides. The left groups in Mauritius accuse them of "dividing the left" and one of the male delegates to London insisted that a journalist delete references both to the Mauritian Women's movement and the fact that women were beaten up on the last demonstration in Mauritius.

Send letters and telegrams of protest to Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister, 10, Downing St. London and Seewoosagar Ramgoolam, Prime Minister, Government House, Mauritius.

—from "Spare Rib"

EL SALVADOR

Ana Maria Gomez Kidnapped

Ana Maria Gomez, 24, one of the founders of the Association of the Women of El Salvador, and one of the leaders of the People's Revolutionary Block, was kidnapped in San Salvador, the capital city, on September 18, 1981. Ana Maria's friends were able to discover that she has been detained in a prison in San Salvador. Her life is in danger, as are the lives of all prisoners there.

El Salvador is a small country in Central America (situated on the neck of land which connects north and south America), It is currently governed by an

extremely repressive junta. Every day, kidnapping, torture, rape, murder are committed by the junta against the Salvadoran people. But the junta is upheld by US might. The president of the junta, Napoleon Duarte, was in the US in September to obtain £ 300 million aid for military and economic use!

There is a strong people's movement in El Salvador but it faces savage repression. International solidarity must help prevent this genocide, and also get Ana Maria out of prison.

Send telegrams demanding the immediate release of Ana Maria Gomez to: Napoleon Duarte, Palacio de Gobierno, San Salvador, El Salvador. (Letters sent c/o Manushi, will be forwarded).

UNEQUAL JUSTICE

In August 1980, Monica Njeri, a Kenyan prostitute, was killed by an American sailor. In October 1980, the sailor was set free. His only sentence was to sign a bond for the equivalent of Rs 500. This money would be returned if he was "of good behaviour for two years"! We publish here extracts from an article from the October 1980 issue of Nairobi's Viva Magazine, which expresses the shock and anger of many Kenyans at this violation of justice.

MANY of us are not legal experts and are not in a position to prove that our law was violated... All we can say is that if the law was not violated, it appears to be a law that metes out unequal justice to an unequal people, a law that is sensitive to the political pressure of powerful countries like the United States...The crime was committed on August 3, 1980 and on September 30, Sundstrom was a free man. How fast the legal machinery worked...as if the courts feared to inconvenience the accused!

...Why did Sundstrom kill Njeri? Sundstrom paid the equivalent of Rs 200 to Njeri for his sexual pleasure. Then he wanted not only to take back this money but also to take another Rs 200 belonging to Njeri! According to Sundstrom, Njeri attacked him, when she discovered him taking the money, whereupon he broke a bottle on her jaw, and used the broken bottle to stab her on the breast repeatedly till she died.

Legal purists may argue that Njeri was not entitled to Sundstrom's money, as prostitution is illegal. But such purists must admit...that prostitution thrives in our society and holy-faced people benefit from it...As consent for sexual intercourse rests solely on the contract, once the contract is broken by the man, the sexual relation is rendered a violation of the woman; when Sundstrom took back his money, he automatically became guilty of rape.

When he took an extra Rs 200 from Njeri, he also became a robber. Nothing more, nothing less. **Njeri was killed when she tried to resist a stranger who had revealed himself as a rapist and a robber.**

But strangely and incomprehensibly, Senior State Council Nicholas Hatwood and Justice Harris interpreted these facts in Sundstrom's favour. The fact that Njeri attacked Sundstrom first (we have only Sundstrom's word for it) was seen as an instigating factor—as if a victim of rape and violent robbery is expected to smile at her attacker and ensure his safe conduct from her house! And the repeated, vicious blows against Njeri, obviously intended to kill, were conveniently ignored by the learned judge. Another strange excuse for Sundstrom—he had been smoking *bhang*. As if smoking *bhang* would be the normal thing to do in our country!

Yet another excuse was that the killer is 19 years old while the victim was 29. In which country are people too old to be useful at 29? And the fact that Njeri had children who needed her care did not matter to the learned gentlemen prosecuting, defending and judging in the Sundstrom case. They felt some kinship with Sundstrom, none with Monica Njeri.

Why was it that the victim was put on trial in her own country while the foreign criminal was treated with



unheard-of graciousness?..The judge ventured beyond the limits of trying an individual case when he directed the state counsel to institute investigations aimed at curbing prostitution in the area. **Who doesn't see the implication that in fact it is Sundstrom, young, pure, (white?) who was the victim of prostitution in Kenya ?!**

...Does the venerable judge not know that prostitution thrives in our country to a large extent because our country is so welcoming to tourists? The La Salle (Sundstrom's ship) is not the last navy ship which will call at Mombasa, carrying white, sex-adventurists. Is anybody forgetting that we have granted military "facilities" to the USA? Wherever such "facilities" have existed, as in South Vietnam and South Korea, deplorable inroads have been made into national culture and the native woman has been a victim of all kinds of indignities...The tourists are a good commercial proposition for our country and the American navy a good political and

strategic proposition. Needless to say, it was not Monica Njeri who devised our economic, commercial, political and strategic systems. The only crime Njeri did was to fit herself into the structures and values of a world she did not create.

..Many of us glory in the unique “prosperity” of Kenya among African countries, rate high tourism’s role in that prosperity, also rate high the role of loans and investments from powerful, countries with whom we believe we share strategic interests, without wanting to realize that a significant part of our prosperity has been created by playing up to the pleasures and conveniences of foreigners, and has been built on the ruin of our human dignity.

...Nobody may put prostitution in the dock without putting our whole society, as well as our society’s wooing of the foreign world, in the dock ...No worse morally than the bulk of us in this society, Njeri was a human being whose blood cried for redress... Those who send their navy ships on “goodwill missions” (missions of death ?) should be legally bound to compensate Njeri’s family, for Njeii was a bread-earner...’

The Sundstrom case set one thinking about the United States’ attitude to justice elsewhere. It is difficult to imagine that the emissaries of that powerful country did not take an active interest in the case, so that the outcome was justice denied to a black woman (as it is denied to black people in the United States). So much concern has been expressed in our country by dignitaries, by sections of the press, about the “injustice” meted out to 50 American hostages by Khomeini’s Iran. Perhaps we have always misunderstood the role played by the powerful US in consolidating injustice in other lands. Perhaps other countries understood this long ago. Who can blame them for avenging injustice to their people, when they seize power ?

Some will argue that individual Americans shouldn’t suffer for the sins of their country. But this is too simple. Frank Sundstrom was an individual but he could shed blood with impunity under the steel umbrella of American power...

— Paul Ngiga Njoroge

To You, Monica

*They told me you were a prostitute.
I don’t know what that means,
really,
but they were more than sure that
you started the fight
that had you killed.*

*And in self-righteous tones,
they said, when I disbelieved
their verdict,
“Well, what did you expect ?
That woman was a prostitute.
She had no business
moving around with sailors anyway!
She ensnared him !
Made him fall into evil ways !
Flaunted her body
in front of him!
Broke his resistance
and took away his money!*

*“That woman was a prostitute”
they said,
“And he was only a man.”
But I wonder.
Isn’t a prostitute also
a woman ?
And if she sold her body
for money,
did he not buy her body
with money ?*

*A woman who sells her body for
money is a prostitute.
True.
What about the man
who buys her body with money ?
Isn’t he also a prostitute ?
If in this land,
people are going to jail,
for growing bhang
To educate their children,
and if
foreign sailors aboard
the US La Salle
can still
sail into our land,
defile, rape and
even kill our sisters,*

*then, sail out to freedom,
unhurried, unchained and free,
Then I say: No !
We have been lied to !*

*There is no justice
for all. Only
justice for the foreign,
justice for the rich,
but the greatest criminal
in the eyes of the law
is she who has nothing.
Still they cried “No!
That woman was a prostitute !
She ensnared him,
made him fall Into evil ways,
flaunted her body
in front of him,
broke his resistance
and took away his money.”*

*And I wanted to shout :
No!
She was human
and hungry.
A mother of two,
she needed food
shelter,
and clothing.
And he ensnared her !
flaunted his money
in front of her !
Crucified her body !
And took away her life !*

*From the rooftops
I wanted to shout :
“Tumenyimwa Waki Zetu !”
But I have been around
long enough to know
that only deaf men
walk the streets nowadays.
So I do not shout
from the rooftops,
I only feel
a funny kind of pain
each time I think about you.*

—Waiywa Wachira