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May 16, 2007  
Sonia Ossorio  
President, NOW-NYC  
212.627.9895

## **New York Press Advertises NYC Brothels, Complicit in Human Trafficking Industry**

Anyone who has ever looked at a copy of the free weekly, *The New York Press*, has seen “massage” or “body work” ads on its back pages. What most people don’t realize is that many of the self-proclaimed “spas” offering these services are, in fact, fronts for brothels; in other words, human trafficking.

Today, trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation, labor, and domestic servitude is the world’s third fastest growing illegal enterprise, following only illegal drug and arms sales. With an estimated 17,500 women and girls smuggled in every year, the United States ranks as the second highest destination in the world for trafficked women. New York City is consistently named as a favorite base of operations among traffickers. Seemingly, a city of 8 million people could provide enormous autonomy for criminals to continue under the radar. What’s shocking is that New York City traffickers and pimps are no longer operating anonymously. Due in large part to growing public apathy and lax laws, brothel owners are now free to advertise prostitution, and indeed, the trafficking of human beings, in publications citywide.

Traffickers use various middle-people to perpetrate their crimes. Landlords, credit card companies, and corrupt government officials all profit. Advertisements for brothels have proven incredibly lucrative to free weeklies like the *New York Press*, making these publications some of the biggest beneficiaries in the overall human trafficking industry. Despite its status as an “alternative” paper, the *Press* is far from obscure. According to the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies, the *Press* had a readership of more than 105,000 people. *The Village Voice*, a weekly with more than twice the readership of the *Press*, generates an average of \$80,000 per month from the adult ads on its back pages. Other smaller papers report that they would be unprofitable or unable to publish if they rejected “adult” ads.

The voracious drive for profits has begun to influence the very structure of many newspapers. Ignoring New York State law requiring all massage parlors be licensed, publications like the *New York Press* do not require “body work” brothels to report a license number before placing an ad. Unlicensed spas, making up the vast majority of all spa ads, are listed in a special section designated by the euphemistic title “Relaxation Therapy”.

Print publications are not the only media outlets used by traffickers. Websites known as “john boards” serve as necessary communication tools for brothel clientele to chat about their experiences in candid spa reviews. Oftentimes, message board topics allude to the illegal activities going on behind closed doors. In graphic detail “johns” discuss contracting Sexually Transmitted Infections such as genital herpes from various massage parlors, complain of the constant rotation of girls and spa locations, and what the going tip rate is for certain sexual acts. These johns seem aware that the majority of brothel workers are trafficking victims, smuggled from abroad and held in a situation of sexual slavery and violence. The prevalence of underage girls, some as young as twelve years old, only increases interest in the massage parlor world among sexual predators and others who seek out commercial sex as a “hobby”.

Upon launching its campaign to ***End the Business of Human Trafficking*** in New York City, NOW-NYC attempted to open up a dialogue with the *New York Press*, hoping to encourage the paper to practice its due diligence by distinguishing between ads for brothels those for legitimate massage parlors and spas. Repeated cancellations on the part of *New York Press* representatives and the ultimate failure to meet with NOW-NYC executives sent a clear message. “The *Press*’ unwillingness to work with us only empowers traffickers in the long

run,” says Sonia Ossorio, president of NOW-NYC. “While other publications are pledging to make the changes necessary to fight back, the *New York Press* seems intent on holding onto illegal profits. By not weaning themselves off this easy money, they are prostituting themselves.”

The National Organization for Women is the nation’s largest organization working to advance women’s rights and improve women’s lives. The New York City Chapter of NOW, founded in 1966, is the largest chapter in the country with 7,000 members locally and 35,000 statewide. NOW-NYC works to protect women’s reproductive choices, end violence against women and eliminate sex discrimination in our schools, workplaces, and the justice system in New York.