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Sonia Ossorio
President, NOW-NYC
212.627.9895

Local Newspapers and Magazines Profit from the Business of Human Trafficking

NYC Publications Sign Anti-Trafficking Pledge and Reject Brothel Ads

New York, NY—On the heels of Governor Spitzer’s announcement that the state of New York is tightening laws to fight trafficking, the National Organization for Women in New York City launches a new phase in its campaign ***Ending the Business of Human Trafficking in New York City***. Aimed at ending newspapers and magazines’ reliance on advertisement revenue from illegal massage parlors and brothels, the women’s rights organization is asking local publications to stop doing business with the organized commercial sex industry by signing an anti-trafficking pledge ***Trafficking Free, NYC!***

“Traffickers supply the local brothel market to meet demand for commercial sex,” said Sonia Ossorio, President of the National Organization for Women in New York City. “Once publishers understand how these massage parlors and ‘bodywork’ businesses operate, many are making the decision not to be associated with it. Others, unfortunately, are generating such a big percentage of their revenue from it, they feel they can’t walk away.”

“The proliferation of organized prostitution in communities throughout New York is undeniable,” according to Ted Hughes, a law enforcement expert in organized criminal prostitution rings. “They are part of the local economy. Whether it’s the landlords who rent to traffickers at three times the market rate or the publications that act as the marketing arm of this organized crime, the scope of the problem is larger than most people would like to think.”

The Village Voice generates \$80,000 a month on the adult ads that line its back pages. *The New York Press* and *New York Magazine* rake in an estimated \$12,000 and \$10,000 per week, respectively. Locally, the Verizon Yellow Pages generates hundreds of thousands of dollars annually on its extensive escort services and massage parlor advertising categories.

These ads are for illegal businesses. In New York, massage parlors must be licensed by the state. If they are not licensed, they are prohibited from advertising or operating. Newspapers understand this. *New York Magazine* and the *New York Press* explicitly make the distinction between legitimate spas and illegal massage parlors by featuring two separate ad categories and by charging up to three times the normal rate for the illegal businesses.

“We’re simply asking publishers to do basic due diligence and use common sense,” Ossorio said. “If someone calls asking for a classified ad that reads ‘Russian Girls, Young, 24/7’ what’s there to check out? Take the contact information and call the police.”

The above ad appeared in *El Diario/La Prensa* May 17, 2007.

Ads provide buyers of commercial sex access to trafficked women. In March 2006, a large brothel in Flushing, Queens was shut down after an investigation by federal prosecutors. The house had secret passageways, and the vault held the women’s passports, \$800,000 in cash and a supply of the drug ecstasy. This brothel was advertised regularly in the *World Journal*, a daily Mandarin newspaper.

“There aren’t enough American women willing to do high volume assembly-line sex work to meet demand, so foreign women are brought to New York,” Ossorio said. “Brought under the false pretense that jobs await them as babysitters, housekeepers or waitresses, they quickly find out their job recruiters are pimps.”

Vowing to make trafficking a priority, Governor Spitzer and the Assembly and Senate leaders agreed last week to enact a comprehensive law that criminalizes trafficking and provides victim services. “This is a landmark piece of legislation in this newly created crime category,” Ossorio said. “It recognizes the role demand plays in the proliferation of organized prostitution by raising the penalties for johns and sexual predators.”

NOW-NYC applauds *Time Out New York*, *The Brooklyn Paper*, *Hoy*, *Our Town*, *Westside Spirit*, *The Westsider*, *Our Town Downtown*, *City Hall*, *Chelsea Clinton News*, *AVENUE*, *New York Family*, *The Queens Courier* and *The L Magazine* for taking the pledge and ensuring that their paper does not profit from trafficking.

NOW-NYC provides training to publishers on how to conduct due diligence. The first and easiest procedure to set in place is for publishers to require massage parlors and “body work” businesses to provide a New York State license.

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.