

CALL TO ACTION, AWARENESS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

TRAN LE // STAFF WRITER // tle@media.ucla.edu

Thousands of people are trafficked into the United States annually only to be forced into prostitution and physical labor; how can we combat a global issue on a local level?



Cambodian activist Somaly Mam opens up her life and shares her experience in combating trafficking with the UCLA campus.

At the age of nine, Shyima had already lost her childhood. She was sent away from Alexandria, Egypt to earn money for her family. With only a student visa and passport, Shyima was trafficked to Irvine, Calif. and locked in a dirty garage for sixteen months. If she ran away or threatened her hosts, she would not find help and instead endanger her family in Egypt. Shyima labored for 20 hours everyday, seven days a week.

Every year, between 14,500 and 50,000 people are trafficked into the United States, according to a report by the United States Department of Justice. The majority of trafficked people are women and children, who are often forced into labor or sexual exploitation. Victims of human trafficking and smuggling are sold as laborers or prostitutes.

In December 2007, Operation Red Light in Rosemead, Calif. cracked down on online sex advertisements. Ar-

rests were made in townhomes, apartments, massage parlors, and hotel rooms. In August 2009, a Vietnamese man was arrested in Westminster after a prostitution raid in a chiropractor's office that offered massage services. Eleven Vietnamese women were captives of the brothel operation.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, victims of trafficking have access to federally funded services including assistance with housing, food, income, healthcare, and employment. With Shyima's story brought to the public, Orange County had its first federal prosecution case of human trafficking in 2006.

To combat trafficking, the Vietnamese Alliance to Combat Trafficking (VietACT) intentionally places advertisements (seeking volunteers and including a hotline for victims) next to the ads of massage parlor employment in local Asian newspapers.

VietAct is currently producing monthly Action Calendars, which includes facts and action items to help combat trafficking. Since 2004, VietACT has been a volunteer-driven effort which sends interns to work at a shelter in Taiwan. The internship is open to undergraduate and graduate students.

On September 30, 2009, survivor and activist Somaly Mam hosted a forum on human trafficking in Cambodia. In a lecture room of the UCLA School of Law, Mam shared her experiences as a victim of human trafficking. Today, Mam is actively fighting police corruption and saving and sheltering women from sexual and physical abuse.

"I know how to save them, but you know how to end it. We have to work together," says Mam prompting the room of students to create policies and make changes in the field of international human rights.

But organizations and activists cannot do it alone. Polaris Project, VietACT, and the Somaly Mam Foundation depend on volunteers to effectively fight against human trafficking. The first step to action is education and awareness, although many on-campus students do not realize how local the issue truly is.

"I would be very interested in learning more about the problem as well as possible solutions," said fourth-year sociology major Helen Dung. "If I were a victim, I may feel compelled to keep quiet because of possible backlash. There could be many victims who currently do not have the opportunity to stand up for themselves and seek help!"

"I was not aware there are so many cases local to our community and surprised that this kind of problem hits so close to home [sic]," said fourth-year international development studies major Christina Nguyen. "I would have thought this was more of an overseas issue and I don't believe students are aware enough of the problem. It's extremely unfair for the victims and they need to be provided with adequate assistance. Everyone should join in on the fight against human trafficking because we all could be potential victims in a global problem."

- To report a tip, connect with anti-trafficking services, or request training services, contact National Human Trafficking Resource Center (hotline for victims operated by Polaris Project): 1-888-373-7888
- To take action and raise awareness, visit the website: <http://actioncenter.polarisproject.org>
- To order posters, stickers, and brochures, please visit: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking/about/form.htm>.
- Currently, VietACT intern Calix V. Bui of San Diego is completing her third month in Taiwan. You can follow Calix on her journey by reading her blog at: <http://vietactintern.blogspot.com/>

EXPLORING THE MARGINS

A NEW WAVE OF CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

RAY LUO // A&E EDITOR // rluo@gmail.com

Remember the time in mainland China when everyone from the pre-school toddler to the aged matriarch wanted to come to the United States to live the American dream? While America is still a magnet for the college student and the recent graduate looking for work, other countries have become a draw by virtue of their economic and social appeals. Some of the most popular places have surprisingly been nations of the Middle East.

But who in their right minds, as a traditional Chinese person, would go to the Islamic Middle East?

Jacky Ng, a student at Hong Kong University, is studying for his masters at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) at Thuwal, which lies just north of Mecca, a holy center of Islamic pilgrimages at the core of Saudi Arabia.

"Saudi Arabia is a place full of opportunities," said Ng. "It has a lot of development projects [for which] engineers and technicians are highly in need."

Part of a new wave of Middle Eastern investment in education, KAUST is a unique graduate university that has been a leader in energy, biotechnology, and computing research. All classes are taught in English, and it attracts some of the best talents from around the world.

"The school provides very generous amount of scholarship covering tuition fees, books, laptops, and living stipends," said Ng. "[It] also provides strong support in research funding."

The emergence of top notch research universities in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East has caused an influx of talent into the area, spearheaded by the top students in China. Many of Ng's friends, such as graduate students Desmond Lee and Eric Shiu, are already deep into their graduate research

careers in KAUST.

Although KAUST provides economic and intellectual advantages for students from China, it can be a challenge to live in a part of the world so wholly different from Asia. Those who enroll in KAUST have between three and four years of life in the hot desert area of Saudi Arabia to look forward to, but this does not concern Ng as much.

"It's [a way] to enrich personal experiences," said Ng. "Living in another country and experiencing another culture can promote personal growth."

What a completely different culture it is too. For example, people of Saudi Arabia are required to pray five times a day while facing the holy Kaaba in Mecca. This ritual, called the salat, follows a specific set of rules referenced in the Quran, such as a sequence of bowings (rakas) repeated up to four times during each salat.

Another example involves the wearing of the hijab, a black veil, by women of Islamic faith in order to prevent unwanted advances, a practice that made Chinese women in the Middle East stand out among the crowd.

One of the rare women who walk around the streets of Dubai without a hijab is Ms. Yao Wen, a recent graduate of the Xian University of Technology who now works in Dubai, a city facing the Persian Gulf to the West that serves as the commercial center of the United Arab Emirates.

"I miss staying with family, connecting with old friends, and the comfortable life," said Wen. "But there are more and more people going to the Middle East, because we have a lot of competition and pressure in China, so working [in Dubai] provides more opportunities."

When Wen graduated with a degree in power electronic

engineering in 2007, her first job was working for the China State Construction Engineering Corporation as quantity surveyor. She signed a contract that ended up shipping her to work in Dubai for 2-3 years.

"I just wanted to go abroad," said Wen. "[So I can] see some different cultures, ... and earn more than three or four times I would make if I stayed in Beijing."

Dubai is undergoing a construction craze that includes the underwater hotel Hydropolis, the conspicuous resort called Palm Islands, the 3 billion square feet theme park Dubailand, the so-called seven star fish-scale-shaped hotel Burj Al Arab, and of course, the world's tallest building the Burj Dubai. The craze has spurred companies like China State Construction, which has over 300 employees in Dubai.

Dubai is not short on culture either. It hosts the Dubai International Film Festival, UAE league football, an annual shopping festival good for buying luxury goods, as well as numerous clubs and bars. Still Wen finds it hard to adapt to life in the Middle East.

"The [hardest] thing is not having good public transport; it's not easy to go anywhere," said Wen. "But our company arranges everything for us, including food-- Chinese chef in mess hall, and accommodation."

Despite the economic advantages, living in Dubai can be frustrating, and Wen would not recommend it to all of her friends.

"We rarely have conversation with local people, because may be they have too much money and [don't need] to work anymore, and we have a language barrier," said Wen. "When they see some Asians and Europeans, they will stare at [them] without pretending."