

From: Living Without Violence & Exploitation **On Behalf Of** Donna M Hughes

Sent: Thursday, November 05, 2009

Attempt to weaken sex trade proposal dismissed by Lords

The House of Lords last night rejected a final attempt to weaken the Governments proposed new law to tackle sex trafficking. The Government wants to criminalise anyone paying for sex with a prostitute who is being exploited by someone else, whether or not he knows about her situation.

It hopes the proposal, Clause 14 of the Policing and Crime Bill, will help cut the demand for prostitution and so stem the tide of women and girls trafficked into the UK to be forced into the sex trade. However, the Liberal Democrats tabled an amendment which said the offence should only apply if the person buying sex is aware, or ought to be aware that the prostitute is being exploited.

It was tabled by Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer who claimed that toughening the law would drive prostitution further underground. She also said that she did not believe that most prostitutes are trafficked women. Other Peers challenged her claims and defended Clause 14.

Lord Morrow called forced prostitution contemporary slavery and pointed out that it exists only because there is a demand for it. Baroness O Cathain said she would prefer an outright ban on prostitution, but that Clause 14 represented a mighty first step in declaring that we are a humane society, we believe in human rights, we wish to protect the vulnerable and we particularly wish to protect children from being blighted for life.

Baroness Howarth of Breckland said that the previous evening she had met with organisations supporting women caught in the sex trade, and that she was bringing a message from them. She said they wanted the law to set a marker, adding that rather than drive prostitution underground, prostitutes themselves believed Clause 14 would let them come forward. It will stop providers enslaving women, or at least deter them, because even if you are a user and not the pimp you are complicit, she said.

The Archbishop of York, Lord McColl of Dulwich and the Attorney-General Baroness Scotland of Asthal also spoke against Baroness Millers amendment. At the end of the debate the Houses opposition to the amendment was so vocal that no formal division was necessary. The remaining stages of the Policing and Crime Bill are set to be completed next week. The Christian Institute has welcomed the new offence.

The Institutes Director, Colin Hart, said: It was great to hear several prominent Christian Peers speaking out in the Lords debate and I am delighted with the result.

Particular tribute should be paid to the team from CARE (Christian Action Research and Education) for their tireless efforts on this issue. More than half of UK prostitutes have been raped or suffered indecent assault and three quarters have experienced physical violence. Over half the prostitutes involved in one study said that they had feared for their lives at least once.

An international study published in the Journal of Trauma Practice found that 68 per cent of prostitutes met the criteria for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, with symptoms as severe as victims of torture. The same study shows that nine in ten prostitutes want to escape prostitution but feel unable to do so.