

Nightclubs Sign Code to Fight Child Prostitution at Kenyan Coast

By Cathy Majtenyi, Nairobi

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In Kenya, efforts to cut down on child prostitution in tourist areas along the coast have recently been boosted as more establishments are agreeing to sign a code of conduct to protect children from sexual exploitation.

Among other things, the code of conduct calls on those working in hotels to recognize when incidents of child prostitution may be taking place and to turn offenders over to the police. For almost two years, the Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers has been urging hoteliers to sign onto the code and receive training on how to deal with child prostitution. Recently, the campaign expanded to include nightclubs, bars, pubs and restaurants as tourist venues that are being urged to sign the code of conduct.

The chairman of the coastal branch of the Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers, Mohammed Hersi, says he believes the inclusion of these drinking places into the campaign, which he calls a "milestone," will go far in stopping the problem before it even begins. "We now have the restaurants, pubs, and nightclubs arm of the Hotel Keepers Association," he said. "Before these adults find these minors, and then take them to a hotel room, they meet them somewhere, and that's more often than not in the nightclub or a pub. So now we've got those (nightclubs) to join us so that nobody under 18 will be allowed into any nightclubs."

Hersi says that all the major, internationally recognized nightclubs along the Kenyan coast have signed onto the code. But there is still much to be done. Hersi says that, of the 70 or so major hotels along the coast, only around 28 have signed the code. Hersi describes what is involved in implementing the code. "If you've declined to take somebody's booking or declined to sell a room to someone who is with a minor who is not related to the person and there's no evidence, you're supposed to tell them, have a seat, and you silently call the security manager of the hotel. In the process, you call the tourist police unit and that person is locked up," he said.

The issue of child prostitution was highlighted in December when the U.N. children's agency and the Kenyan government released a report that found about 15,000 girls between the ages of 12 to 18 are estimated to be involved in sex tourism in the area along the coast. The study found the majority of those seeking the sexual services of children are Kenyans. Most of the other clients are Italians, Germans, and Swiss.