

NEWS RELEASE

World Vision applauds conviction of child sex tourist

MISSISSAUGA, Ont. (September 9, 2011)—International aid agency World Vision welcomed the conviction of 51-year-old Michael Julian Leach of London, England, found guilty of paying for sex with three underage girls in Cambodia, but warns child sex tourism around the world continues.

Leach was arrested in Phnom Penh in September 2010 after the guest house he was staying in was raided. He will now serve 12 years in a Cambodian jail, before being deported back to the UK. World Vision has provided counseling, medical and recovery support for Leach's victims in Cambodia, and warns there are still too many opportunities for travelling sex offenders to commit crimes against children.

“This crime is horrendous. While Leach's conviction and 12-year sentence are a triumph for Cambodian and British authorities who collaborated to bring Leach to trial, the three children he abused will carry their trauma and scars for life and many more are vulnerable,” said Dave Toycen, president of World Vision Canada.

“I've met with children at World Vision's Cambodia Trauma Recovery Centre and their stories are heartbreaking. Their childhoods have been stolen, they are often ostracized by family and communities and they've suffered unimaginable abuse,” says Toycen. “We would never tolerate this happening to our own children, so we must not tolerate it happening in Cambodia and other countries where extreme poverty and lack of protection makes children easy prey.”

“Every country—including Canada—must be rigorous in bringing these offenders to justice by partnering with local authorities in countries like Cambodia where travelling sex offenders target children,” says Toycen.

Canada and travelling child sex offenders

In 1997 the Canadian Criminal Code was amended so travelling child sex offenders can be prosecuted in Canada for crimes committed abroad.

According to an access to information request in 2008, 146 Canadians were charged with child sex offences overseas from 1993-2007. However, the real figure is likely much higher as many cases of Canadians sexually abusing children abroad were never detected.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children has two sides which fuel this gross violation of children's rights: the supply side and the demand side. Canadians who purchase sex from children—boys and girls under the age of 18—are fueling this problem by contributing to the demand for sex with children.

With the full support of World Vision and other anti-trafficking organizations, Canada passed Bill C-268 in June 2010, which imposes minimum sentences for child traffickers.

World Vision's child protection work in Cambodia

- World Vision began outreach to Cambodian street children in the mid-1990s. Staff quickly saw the need to shield children from sexual exploitation and help abused children recover.

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- World Vision opened the Cambodia Trauma Recovery Centre in Phnom Penh to support girls who have been sexually abused, raped or trafficked. The centre houses about 60 girls who stay for six to 12 months in the concealed compound where they receive counseling, health care, basic education and vocational training.
- World Vision works with the tourism industry to better protect children from sexual abuse by locals and foreign nationals. It also works with law enforcement agencies and courts to increase reporting of sexual abuse and see through successful prosecutions, such as that of Michael Leach.
- World Vision also works globally to prevent children being targeted by travelling sex offenders, through education and creating other ways for them and their family to make a living.
- World Vision has been engaged in preventing and mitigating the effects of the commercial sexual exploitation of children overseas for more than a decade by addressing both the supply and demand side of this problem.

World Vision is asking Canadians to:

1. Take responsibility for the impact of their own travel by researching hotels and travel companies to ensure codes of conduct have been signed to protect children.
2. Report the exploitation of children – labour, sexual or trafficking – that they witness while abroad (cybertip.ca).
3. Deter any travel companions from engaging in such behaviours.

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