

NEWS RELEASE

World Tourism Day: Canadian tourists can protect children from sexual exploitation

- *World Vision gives Canadians tips on how to practice “child-safe tourism” in light of rampant travelling child sex offenders*
- *Canadian government must use extraterritorial legislation to convict offenders; in 14 years, only four convictions*

MISSISSAUGA, Ont. (September 26, 2011)—As South East Asia’s tourism industry explodes with huge increases in arrival numbers, more needs to be done to protect children from sexual exploitation by travelers, warns World Vision on the eve of World Tourism Day. Many of the countries in the region are known as “hot spots” where travelling child sex offenders target vulnerable children.

“The numbers for this region are alarming, but South East Asia isn’t unique. Wherever there is poverty and weak protection, children are at risk of sexual exploitation. It happens all over the world—and in many countries popular with Canadian travelers, including many Caribbean destinations,” says Caroline Riseboro, vice president of Public Affairs with World Vision Canada.

“Tourism does help to boost economies, but the dark side of tourism is it creates opportunities for the sexual abuse of children. Tourists can protect children by demanding tour operators, hotels and restaurants don’t turn a blind eye when children are at risk. By knowing the laws and how to report suspected abuse overseas, Canadians can help, just as they would if they suspected the sexual abuse of a child here at home.”

World Vision’s warning comes as the latest figures from countries like Thailand show arrival numbers growing at annualized rates of 26 per cent (11.17 million visitors) for the first six months of 2011. Even off-the-beaten track countries like Laos last year hosted 2.5 million visitors, on par with Cambodia, while Vietnam had five million visitors.

“In our work overseas, we see the ‘push-down/pop-up’ effect. When one country or region gets serious about protecting children and convicting offenders, the criminals simply pack up and move where there are more vulnerable children and weaker protections and laws,” says Riseboro. “We’re seeing this happening in South East Asia where the problem has shifted to places like the Philippines, where many of the male tourists come for sexual purposes.”

World Vision is asking Canadians to:

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

BACKGROUND:

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.

Sexual exploitation of children by tourists 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. Children abused by travelling sex offenders, are often victims of trafficking.

What World Vision is doing to protect children:

- Calling on Canada to use our extra-territorial legislation swiftly and effectively to convict Canadians who abuse children overseas when the country where the abuse took place can't or won't. This law has been in place for 14 years, but only four people have been convicted and we know the number of Canadians accused is more than 150.
- Calling on CIDA to continue to tackle poverty in developing countries which is a key driver of child sex tourism. CIDA must also create more protective environments for children by training everyone from children themselves, to parents, teachers, doctors, social workers, police officers and local and national levels of government to prevent and respond to abuse.
- Working with the tourism industry to better protect children from sexual abuse by locals and foreign nationals. World Vision also works with law enforcement agencies and courts to increase reporting of sexual abuse and see through successful prosecutions.
- Working 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.
- Engaging in preventing and mitigating the effects of the commercial sexual exploitation of children overseas. World Vision has been doing this for more than a decade by addressing both the supply and demand side of this problem.

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