

END INTERNET TRAFFICKING COALITION



PRESS RELEASE: THE INTERNET & HUMAN TRAFFICKING

(June 16, 2009) End Internet Trafficking Coalition (EITC) was created to bring attention to the problem of human trafficking via the internet and to work toward its elimination. The fact that Craigslist has been the major internet vehicle for the trafficking of human beings in the United States has led our coalition to pay particular attention to this website and the way the company has chosen to respond to public and legal pressure. Overall, the Attorneys General of 40 states charge that Craigslist's "Erotic Services" section is a veiled forum for prostitution and the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation. Countless cases and incidents in mainstream news media and press releases point to the problematic usage of Craigslist¹.

EITC recognizes Craigslist's recent move to eliminate the Erotic Services section and replace it with an Adult Services category (requiring that the new section be reviewed by Craigslist employees to screen ads for prostitution and illegal activity) as another step in acknowledging its responsibility to protect the vulnerable from exploitation and trafficking. While this signals a continued shift toward increasing the control of their services, we have concerns about how "progressive" the move to an Adult Services category will be, given that Craigslist CEO Jim Buckmaster stated that the company screens every adult ad but cannot be held responsible for what happens during the encounters that result². Lack of accountability remains at the heart of the problem of exploitation through Craigslist. As a result of the screening process, the number of advertisements in the Adult/Erotic Services sections of most of the major cities in the US has subsided, but the sexual content with lewd pictures still persists. Activists and the general public remain highly concerned about the extent to which the detrimental effects of the Erotic/Adult Services sections of Craigslist on the youth population have really been ameliorated. To further illuminate the limitations of the current efforts, New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo contends that, "... until Craigslist gets serious about putting real protections in place, it will continue to be an environment where criminal operations thrive with impunity."

Craigslist is by no means the sole site of concern for internet-based trafficking, but it is an iconic representation of the glaring need for active oversight and monitoring of sexual exploitation on the internet. In fact, there are far more problematic sites that exclusively focus on erotic/adult services that could potentially facilitate human trafficking: sfredbook.com, seekbang.com, thelittleblackbookofescorts.com, and escortsinusa.com are just a few examples. EITC calls upon all allies in the anti-trafficking movement to recognize that Craigslist is just one of many online resources used frequently for violence and exploitation. The internet is an increasingly key medium in the trafficking of human beings for multiple forms of violent exploitation.

In order to truly make progress, organizations and services that advocate for human rights cannot be anti-internet; we must continue to utilize the internet as an important resource and networking tool while challenging ourselves to design better, more creative solutions that include collaboration with website companies like Craigslist that have a critical

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opportunity to lead the way in eradicating human trafficking from their sites. We invite the leaders and creative engineers of Craigslist, other public marketplace websites, and internet safety organizations to the EITC table in an effort to strive towards sustainable, effective solutions.

The success of EITC's 2009 conference, "Global Disconnects, the Internet & Human Trafficking" and forthcoming publication highlight our strategic ability to gather the most cutting-edge thinkers and practitioners in the field. Other work that has come to the fore for 2009 include The Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (that brought together individuals committed to anti-trafficking work in the District of Columbia, San Francisco, Boston, New York City, and Springfield as a means of networking multiple cities to counter how the internet is used to perpetuate human trafficking. Through our coalition building, we represent tens of thousands of constituents. EITC will continue to be vigilant and vocal in monitoring the activities of Craigslist and other problematic sites on the internet, joining the efforts of Attorneys General Blumenthal, Cuomo, and Madigan, to name a few.

The End Internet Trafficking Coalition

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1. A 17 year-old will see her perpetrator on trial this year. Given the name "Amy," she was taken from her home in El Dorado County to the Bay Area to be prostituted. Advertisements listing her for sex were posted on Craigslist. In Las Vegas, Charles Tyrone Young used MySpace to entice a young girl to his house where he then sold the girl and others over Craigslist. Young ran a prostitution ring out of motels in Las Vegas, Pomona, Montclair, Anaheim, and northern San Diego. In Washington, DC, police found approximately 40 women victimized by Mark Humphries who lured them through Craigslist to isolated apartment buildings and raped them at gunpoint. Perhaps the most visible case of the year is that of the "Craigslist Killer." Philip Markoff, a Boston University medical student, is accused of the murder of one woman in prostitution in addition to assault charges against other women who advertised their services online. He chose escorts because, in his own words, they, "... might not report the attacks." Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan has referred to Craigslist as an "internet brothel."
 2. Davis, Aaron C. "Online Sex Connections Linked to False Sense of Security," Washington Post. 21 May 2009. Web 4 June 2009