

Putting a stop to human trafficking

The trafficking of women to and from Russia is a big problem, said Olga Shmelkova, President of the Russian Branch of the Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association (PPSEAWA). Olga and her colleague, Anna Laputskaya, visited the Foundation en route from Auckland where they had just attended the [PPSEAWA's 23rd International Conference](#). Olga first recounted the state of human trafficking in Russia when she first visited us last year.

The following true story of the ordeal of a Russian girl was reported in the Russian newspaper, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* on 18 November 2004. Lena is a third-year language student at a Russian university. She was supposed to work as a dancer in Harbin, China. Instead, she ended up in Macau as a stripper-prostitute.

It started innocently enough. Lena became friends with a sociable neighbour, Kate. Kate told Lena her friend was forming dance groups to work in China, and that Lena could earn more in a month working in China than six months tutoring in Vladivostok. The prospect was tempting. Lena barely scraped by with what she earned as a private tutor. After an "interview", Lena was



Anna & Olga at the Foundation on 2 April

selected as one of six "lucky girls" bound for Harbin.

But instead of working in Harbin, the girls were re-directed to Macau where they were to work as stripper-prostitutes. Igor, the agent, threatened to send them to prison when the girls refused to work. To escape from Macau is nearly impossible; the journey was treacherous and the girls' "owners" have an agreement with local police to send any "escapee" back to them.

Luckily, Lena's mobile phone was not confiscated and she was able to call her mother, who then paid a Chinese man US\$1500 to rescue Lena. Through stealth and bribery, the man rescued Lena, who is now safely back in Russia unlike many other young victims.

Anna told us there are only a

few shelters in Russia to help victims of human trafficking. "Although there is a hotline, victims do not call because they do not want people to know," she added. For those who are lucky to escape, they usually have no support because of their fear of being "exposed".

In August 2006, the Primorsky Region Government initiated and held an international conference on human trafficking. Some 200 participants from different countries attended. Among them was Winchi Yu Perkins, Director of Programs for Preventing Human Trafficking and Human Rights Protection of Washington-based Vital Voices. Actress and UN Goodwill Ambassador Julia Ormond sent a video message.

However, changes are taking place. In 2003 two articles on human trafficking and slave labour were added to Russia's Criminal Code. Since then, six criminal cases have been brought against traffickers in the Primorsky region. But education is still the key to tackling this issue, according to Olga and Anna. They said PPSEAWA and the authorities have been working on several outreach and educational programs.

Special thanks to Anna for translating the information from Russian.

Short Takes

2006 Sydney Peace Prize recipient Olara Otunnu is listed as a [Lifesaver Hero](#) by an educational online project, [The My Hero Project](#). The California-based project "celebrates the best of humanity" and collates entries by both children and adults.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu has been awarded the [inaugural Mahatma Gandhi Global Nonviolence Award](#). The award will be conferred by the [Mahatma Gandhi Center for Global Nonviolence](#) at James Madison University on 21 September this year. Separately, The Archbishop's work is also being celebrated by a British foundation, [Tutu Foundation UK](#), who has taken on the name of the 1999 Sydney Peace Prize recipient.

Microcredit is fast catching on. Following the success of Grameen Bank, **Professor Muhammad Yunus** will be lending his expertise to help Norway launch a microcredit project in Africa. Professor Yunus, the 1998 Sydney Peace Prize recipient will act as a special adviser to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry's microcredit project in Africa.

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