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[Declaring WAR on human trafficking](#)

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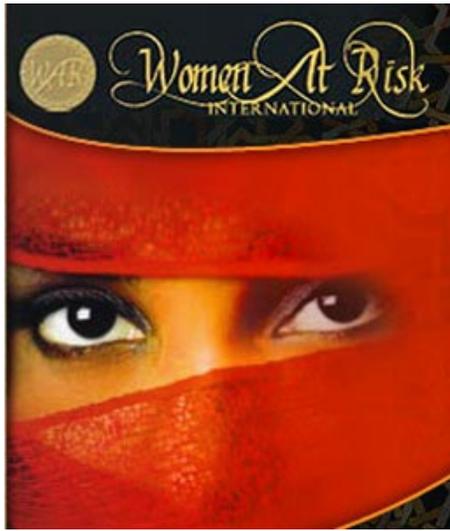
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Rebecca McDonald's resolve to help exploited women and girls around the world began to emerge as a teenager, when she put together relief packages for destitute families at a Bangladeshi hospital where her father worked in the 1970's.

McDonald learned that Nehru, a local girl she'd befriended, had been raped by men in her family. When she spoke out, those men poured acid down her throat "to teach her she had no voice," McDonald said. The girl never spoke again.

"The acid of her suffering burnt a hole in my heart and opened my eyes to issues all around me," McDonald said. The experience also led to her life's work: helping thousands of women and children in countries around the world escape from abuse, sexual slavery, honor killings, human trafficking and prostitution.

McDonald incorporated WAR International in 2006. The organization works with safe houses, orphanages, rescue groups and other agencies in the U.S. and 21 other countries — including Thailand, India and Cambodia — to locate and try to intervene to help women and girls who are being exploited in the sex trade.



WAR International members will go into red-light districts or anywhere they know of a woman in captivity. McDonald said her group will “buy the girls time off the pole” to get the chance to sit with them and offer them the opportunity to escape. WAR International’s partners provide shelter and protection to the women and girls, teach them skills to support themselves through other means and provide help to get a high school diploma or college degree.

“We help those women put their lives back together, that which has been so viciously destroyed,” she said.

In 2008, WAR International also began selling clothing, jewelry and crafts handmade by the rescued women to help fund the group’s anti-trafficking efforts.

McDonald said those who prey on young girls — often luring them into the sex trade with promises of new clothing and shelter — are not necessarily strangers but can be boyfriends, family members, stepparents, even other women. Girls who succumb can be beaten, tortured and stripped of their identities.

WAR International rescued a 1-month-old girl in Thailand who’d been sold by her single mother for \$200 into a known prostitution ring. Her mother was poor and desperate and had four other children.

According to the U.S. State Department’s 2010 Trafficking in Persons report, there are 12.3 million adults and children in forced labor, bonded labor or forced prostitution around the world.

McDonald also outlined the case of an 18-year-old girl raised in a Chicago suburb in a strict Christian family who McDonald said was tricked by an American talent agency into going to Japan with the promise of a singing job. When she arrived, she was brutally beaten and raped by several men, McDonald said.

It’s not a crime that occurs only overseas. Online advertising services in the U.S. have come under fire for hosting ads for child prostitution. Last year, the FBI led a nationwide sting operation that resulted in the arrest of 44 adults in Chicago who authorities said were involved in a child prostitution ring.

“Tens of thousands of individuals are sexually exploited in Chicago each year,” said Rachel Durchslag, executive director of Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation. “The sex trade in Chicago exists for one reason: because there is a demand predominantly for men to go buy the bodies of individuals, most of whom are extremely vulnerable and face limited life options.”

Durchslag said parents, especially of boys, need to teach their children about healthy relationships in order to combat sexual violence and exploitation.

“When parents empower their sons to stand against sexual harm, then all of our daughters will be safer,” she said.

Genesis Ramirez is a former prostitute who now works as a peer coordinator for Dream Catcher, a Chicago-based group helping women escape abuse and sexual exploitation. She said girls work in the sex trade simply to buy basic needs like diapers for their babies.

Ramirez, 19, who is not affiliated with WAR International, said she began prostituting when she was just 15 at the direction

of her daughter's father, who was 24 and said she needed to make money because he was on house arrest and couldn't work. She soon had a baby and a drug habit and continued to work in the sex trade, through Craigslist advertising, even after she was no longer with him.

She said she quit prostituting when she was 17 when she realized how much she was hurting herself and her baby.

"It seemed to be getting harder and harder," Ramirez said. "You think, like, as time goes by you'll get used to the idea of being a prostitute, but really it is something real traumatizing. You don't get used to it, it gets worse."

She said one reason girls are so easily lured into the sex industry is that their families have neglected or abused them physically, emotionally, verbally and sexually.

"All these things cause you to be even more vulnerable," she said. "I was just real vulnerable."

For more information visit [WAR International](#).



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One Response to "Declaring WAR on human trafficking"

1.  [Sex Trafficking Must End](#) says:
[October 15, 2010 at 7:54 PM](#)

Wow, people like this are so inspiring. Thanks for sharing this. It blows my mind that there are women like this literally saving lives and putting them back together who are unknown and unrecognized, while celebrities dominate the news with stories about their hair, relationships, or houses. How do we turn the tide and honour people like McDonald?
-Michelle

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Facts...

“Trafficking in human beings is now the third-largest money making venture in the world, after illegal weapons and drugs. In fact, the United Nations estimates that the trade nets organized crime more than \$12 billion a year.”Inside the New Global Sex Trade

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