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Chair

Mr. Michael Levitt

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1305)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)): Good afternoon.

I call to order this meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights as we continue our study on sex trafficking in South Asia.

Our only witness today, David Matas, has testified before this committee already. I know that he certainly was a frequent guest at the Subcommittee on International Human Rights in the previous Parliament. Mr. Matas is an international human rights and refugee lawyer based in Winnipeg. He was awarded the Order of Canada in 2009 for his international human rights advocacy. Within Beyond Borders ECPAT Canada, he is a member of the board of directors and also provides legal counsel to the organization.

Beyond Borders ECPAT Canada is the Canadian representative of ECPAT International, a global network of 95 organizations in 86 countries committed to ending the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Mr. Matas chaired the international meetings of ECPAT International in Bangkok in 2002 and in Rio de Janeiro in 2005 and 2008.

Once again, Mr. Matas, thank you for joining us here today. If you would begin your testimony, that would be greatly appreciated.

Mr. David Matas (Counsel, Beyond Borders ECPAT Canada): Thank you very much for inviting me.

ECPAT is headquartered in Bangkok, Thailand. It is committed to combatting sexual exploitation of children. The name ECPAT is an acronym and stands for the phrase End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes.

In addition to the activities that you kindly mentioned, I would point out that I was also a member of the international board of directors of ECPAT from 2012 to 2014, representing North America.

The focus of ECPAT in combatting child sexual exploitation in South Asia has been to promote the participation of children. This has been done through its youth partnership project. The involvement of children in promoting respect for the rights of children and in combatting the violation of these rights is embedded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Article 12 of the convention obligates states parties to the convention, including Canada, to:

assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

I point out that this convention, perhaps uniquely amongst all the conventions that have been drafted for signature, has been signed by every single country in the world. The only country that hasn't signed it is Somalia because it didn't have a functioning government, but other than that, every other country has signed and ratified it except for the United States.

Article 14 of the convention obligates:

States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Article 15 of the convention obligates:

States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.

The youth partnership project of ECPAT is directed to child survivors of commercial sexual exploitation in South Asia. It's designed to help formerly exploited children to take the lead in the effort against sexual exploitation of children.

Some of the youth partnership projects include the following. One is training youth in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. These trained youth have set up peer support programs in schools located in high-risk areas to share information and provide individual support to prevent their peers from becoming trapped in commercial sexual exploitation.

Another project trains youth to use media and advocacy skills to reach out to local communities. Through awareness campaigns they aim to reduce the numbers of trafficked children.

A third project works with trained caregivers and local organizations to help them provide psychosocial care for child survivors.

In a fourth project, youth have worked both to improve the lives of child survivors and to persuade adults to end the commercial sexual exploitation of children. So their work isn't directed only to children but also to adults. The project engages in consultations with children about its aims and activities. Youth themselves are invited to make project proposals for microprojects. Adult youth motivators monitor and support these projects.

I can give you one example, although there are many, of one such microproject in India, a library and recreation room for girls residing at a shelter home in West Bengal, India. Many of the girls at the home had been rescued from red light areas in West Bengal. Some were victims of trafficking. This group of 32 girls were attending a mainstream government school. The girls proposed, and the project funded, a purchase of books and games for a shelter library and recreation room. The books purchased included books about human trafficking, health and hygiene, sexual abuse, as well as charts and diagrams on parts of the body. Management of the library and recreation room was the responsibility of the youth.

Here's a quote from the project proposal:

We have experienced the bitter realities of life in red light areas as victims of sexual abuse. We are therefore keen to develop our knowledge in order to help protect other children in similar situations. We would also like to use this knowledge to improve our lives.

The cost of the project was \$215 U.S.

This effort to involve youth in South Asia to combat sexual exploitation has encountered some problems, so let me present to you some of the difficulties that have been encountered.

One of them was simply a difficulty in gaining access or entry to government shelter homes. There was a bureaucracy, and the process often proved to be long and arduous. A second difficulty was that concepts of youth participation were new to the region and were sometimes perceived as disruptive. Third, teaching children that they have a voice and rights can sometimes lead them to express dissatisfaction with their current environment and care, which, as you can imagine, sometimes was not well received by the host organizations.

The caregivers training project was the first time that many caregivers of child victims of sexual exploitation had ever received any type of training on this matter. This made it necessary to build a basic review of these concepts into all training activities and outreach efforts, starting from zero, which required additional time and resources. The lack of prior training motivated training participants to request additional follow-up training on basic sexual exploitation issues and principles of psychosocial rehabilitation, yet the project wasn't funded for this subsequent follow-up training.

The project team experienced difficulty identifying qualified consultants to lead the peer support and media and advocacy training, especially in Bangladesh and Nepal. Lack of understanding of concepts of peer support and media and advocacy made it necessary for ECPAT to organize "train the trainer" sessions. Yet again, this was outside of the budget that was projected for the projects. More time and resources needed to be invested to develop partnerships with smaller, local organizations.

Finally, in terms of these difficulties, an integrated network of community-based organizations working with commercial sexual exploitation of children and trafficking issues needed to be developed.

All this, and more, can be found online. Details of projects funded and their evaluation are in publicly accessible documents. The general message I would convey to the subcommittee, when recommending what can be done to combat child sexual abuse in

South Asia, is to involve the children. Do not just recommend what can be done for children; recommend what can be done in partnership with children.

Those were my prepared remarks. I appreciate the committee's looking into this issue, which from my perspective is a very serious one and deserves your attention.

•(1310)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Matas.

We will move straight into questions. I believe we will begin with MP Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Matas, thank you very much. It's good to see you again.

I want to thank you as well for your ongoing work in exposing organ harvesting, and the trafficking of those organs, of the Falun Gong. If it weren't for you and David Kilgour, that might still be very much underground, still going on and proliferating. You have done great work has and I just want to thank you again for it.

You mentioned project after project. How are your projects being funded now? Are there some governments helping you with funding, philanthropists, or a combination of both?

Mr. David Matas: Funding is an ongoing issue, and ECPAT looks for funds every which way it can. We will take government funding. There are some NGOs that won't, but we will. In fact, there is the Swedish Sida—it has a similar-sounding name to our own CIDA—which has given a lot of money to ECPAT. There is a private organization, The Body Shop, that has given a lot of money to ECPAT. Air France has been very helpful. Of course, there have been some private individuals who have made contributions as well.

It's a constant effort, because a lot of this money is project-directed. Very often, funders like to start things in the hope that they will develop a life of their own, and of course they do in some ways. You can see that what we are doing with South Asia is trying to establish some activities that would have a life of their own, and the amount of money involved is really small. What's important is getting the thing started, but money always helps.

•(1315)

Mr. David Sweet: Just for our recommendations, has any part of Global Affairs Canada funded any of your projects?

Mr. David Matas: Not that I can recall, no. As I said, Sweden has been important, but I don't recall money coming from Canada. Of course, that would be welcome.

Mr. David Sweet: We had some interesting witnesses before by teleconference who have been running, for lack of a better term, "rescue operations" in India. One of the witnesses—I don't recall his name readily—mentioned that he is experiencing or witnessing significant attitude changes in India now. Those crimes used to be a low priority, but now there is a change in the conscience, so to speak, of government officials and police authorities.

Do you see that happening as well?

Mr. David Matas: Well, I've been to India on three different trips in the last year. One of the things I noticed was that the taxis—at least some of them in New Delhi, but nowhere else in the country—have signs saying that “this taxi is safe for women.” I don't know if that's a good sign or a bad sign because, obviously, it bespeaks of the problem, but it also shows that there is an awareness and a willingness to confront the problem.

I would say, yes, there is an attitude shift there, but there's still a big problem.

Mr. David Sweet: In the efforts you've been making and the projects you developed, it was of course interesting to see that the children whom you're inquiring with in your projects are actually helping you to build what's needed for them.

What is the percentage, or are you aware of the percentage, of female versus male children who are trafficked and exploited?

Mr. David Matas: I don't recall seeing that. My sense is that it's predominantly women, but I couldn't give you a percentage. A lot of the material is directed to both types of victims, but the shelters we've been working with have been, from what I recall, pretty much all women.

Mr. David Sweet: It sounds like most of your efforts are for rescue, recovery, and rehabilitation.

Are you working with any of the government officials to prevent trafficking and exploitation?

Mr. David Matas: As I mentioned, one of our projects uses past victims to help develop peer pressure to help prevent people who otherwise might be victims falling from into victimhood. So it's a combination of both. It has both a rehabilitative effect and a preventative effect. In a sense, the people who can sometimes do the most to help prevent this are those who know and can provide warnings, who have an experiential background as well as the same age range, culture, and so on. That's something we're definitely doing by way of prevention.

There are some forms of prevention that I've been involved in with ECPAT Beyond Borders that have to do with pornography over the Internet. That's more of, I would say, a Western, Canadian technological type of problem. The problem in India manifests itself differently.

Mr. David Sweet: You led right into my next question. You find that the sophistication in India is much different from that in the Western world. Are most of these girls acquired and kept locally in brothels and exploited that way, or are there large ways of transiting and moving these girls around?

• (1320)

Mr. David Matas: Well, there is a combination. One of the problems is that the mothers of many of these girls are prostitutes. There is no real support at home to prevent this sort of activity. There are other abusive situations as well. Very often, when you're dealing with girls as opposed to adults, they're typically coming from a very bad home situation.

Of course, there are commercial networks making money out of this, but they find a willing market. Part of the problem, of course, is that when you're dealing with girls or young people, they don't necessarily know what they are getting into, and they are easily

misled, hoodwinked, or painted a rosy picture. There is a lot of misinformation out there, which of course the exploiters take advantage of, and a lot of the prevention is simply getting the right information out.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to MP Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Matas, for coming in today.

I want to continue with Mr. Sweet's line of questioning on how these traffickers operate. Do they function like a small business where there are a number of people who have local rings where women or young people are brought into the trafficking scheme, or is it more of a bigger corporate kind of status where different countries are involved and it is a more complex network of basically acquiring the product, unfortunately, and then selling it off or using that product?

Mr. David Matas: Well, of course, our information comes from the people who are trafficked and then escape and get out of it, and they don't necessarily see the organization from the top. They see it from the bottom, so they'll see the people they're interacting with, and they may not necessarily see the interaction between the people they know and other people.

My sense of it is, at least from the bit I know, that it's more your first option, that there are a lot of small traffickers rather than a multinational conglomerate business, which makes it harder to combat, of course, because you can't just sort of go after one kind of mafia chief and solve the problem.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: In terms of the people who are rescued, does law enforcement have a big role to play in that? I know India has put in human trafficking laws now. With respect to enforcement of those laws, do you think there is a positive impact that these laws are being upheld and there is a movement to eradicating sex trafficking in South Asia?

Mr. David Matas: With some forms of sexual abuse, the police themselves can be a problem because, for instance, if sexual abuse is in the home, sometimes the police in South Asia will say this is a family matter. When it comes to this sort of abuse, which is outside the home, it's less of a problem. There are always potentially corrupt police, but that's less of a problem.

I would say with respect to relying on the police to deal with this, obviously, they should, but I think more needs to be done than that.

One of the things we've tried to do in Canada through Beyond Borders is the man-to-man campaign where we try to get men involved, because very often there is a kind of glorification of sexual hyperactivity within the male population. So peer pressure among men, not just among youths, that this is the wrong thing to do is helpful.

That's something we've been very active in doing in Canada, trying to get high-profile male figures, role models, to sort of come out against child sexual abuse, and that hasn't been happening in India. I think that could usefully be done in India. I didn't focus on that, because that's not something we've actually been doing, as ECPAT in India, but we've been doing it in Canada and I think it's a good model for South Asia as well.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

When you spoke about recommendations as to what we can do, you mentioned we should involve the children, and you spoke a little about how we can do that. What can Canada do as a country to help with involving the children into raising awareness and taking those preventive measures?

• (1325)

Mr. David Matas: Well, I don't know if you've done it yet. I only looked at a couple of your hearings, but I think one of the things you could do is maybe have witnesses who are youth representatives. That would be one form of participation.

I know both locally and internationally, we have tried to involve youth in ECPAT itself and Beyond Borders. We have had youth representatives every year as part of Beyond Borders, and Canadian youth who are part of the international youth component of ECPAT. Of course, they grow up and new ones replace them, but it might be worthwhile talking to those people about their experience in youth involvement.

When they get involved in ECPAT, there is a youth component called EICYAC. They're really looking at this at a very systemic level, and a number of the youth have addressed this issue at a conceptual policy level and it's certainly worth talking to them. When you ask about youth involvement, I think that's the first step. I think youth should be involved from the ground up. You don't sort of put them in at the end; you put them in at the beginning.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: When it comes to issues like child marriage, how can youth be used to help raise awareness against child marriage in poverty-stricken areas where we've learned that a lot of these young women are coming from, where parents are selling them?

Mr. David Matas: I think it's partly just about getting the message out. Many people who have already gone through child marriages have had horrible experiences. People there can tell what's wrong with child marriages because they know from having lived them. I think that's one very useful form of information.

Where there are laws, they should be enforced. Where there are no laws, they should be enacted. Simple advocacy for change in the laws to prevent child marriage or to enforce the laws where they do exist but they're not enforced helps not only in a legal sense, but also as a form of public education because advocacy about the laws and their enforcement tells people what's wrong with these marriages.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khalid.

We're now going to move to MP Hardcastle.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Matas, for the work you're doing.

I'm going to continue along the lines of questioning that we've heard. I want to better understand the legislative environment right now, because you said that we have an issue where laws need to be enforced and that where laws don't exist, they need to be enacted. I'd like to get a better feel for where that is, or where you're most knowledgeable about this, perhaps in India. Are you saying that right now certain acts or activities are not criminalized?

Mr. David Matas: I know that in Canada—obviously I'm more familiar with Canadian laws than foreign laws—when I first got involved in all this, there was a big problem with extraterritoriality. People could be prosecuted if they trafficked within Canada, but if they trafficked outside Canada and then came back to Canada, they couldn't be prosecuted here and the countries where they went weren't interested in prosecuting Canadians, had difficulty doing it, and the laws weren't being enforced, and so on.

Your committee is dealing with all of South Asia here. There is a problem of cross-border trafficking, with girls going from Bangladesh into India or Nepal. As far as I know, that's a legal problem in that area as well. There may be laws in each country dealing with crimes committed in each country, but once you start having border crossings, you get into problems with gaps in the law.

• (1330)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: I'm thinking of the issue of sex tourism, which apparently is on the rise. Maybe later you can talk about how we would be collecting more data, but on the issue of extraterritoriality and people using or accessing children via sex tourism right now, could we quell that if we did have domestic laws against the use of that kind of tourism?

Mr. David Matas: Canada has enacted a law that's extraterritorial, but there are very few prosecutions under it, so I think that's an area of law where there needs to be better enforcement, which to a certain extent is a matter of priority. Again, this isn't only a legal issue, but a cultural issue as well.

With child sex tourism, one of the things that ECPAT has done is to try to work with the travel industry. For instance, Air Canada put a public announcement on its TV screens that you could watch, which I thought was useful.

The Accor hotel chain has put signage on their elevators indicating that they have adopted the code of conduct that ECPAT had been proposing. I saw this in Brazil. So the travel industry itself has done some things, but they could do a lot more, and I think they should be encouraged to do more themselves to combat child sex tourism.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: What would you say the Government of Canada's role could be in improving enforcement, then?

Mr. David Matas: In terms of enforcement, when it comes to the Criminal Code, the administration or the prosecution is provincial, because these are Criminal Code offences. I suppose what the Government of Canada could do is give more support to that.

There is the issue of passports. Right now there are no exit controls of any sort. When you leave Canada, you don't see an official; you only see an official when you enter. There are some people who may have court orders stating that they shouldn't be travelling abroad, but there's no mechanism to know that they've actually left until they have left. This has been an issue.

I think there was a law enacted recently that there is a possibility of your passport actually being taken from you if you've been convicted of a sexual abuse crime. I think that is helpful, but I would say that this, unfortunately, is an area where there's a lot of criminality, and the police tend to get overwhelmed.

I know this particularly with child pornography. There's just so much of it out there that they have to be selective in what they're going after. Part of it is having the technological wherewithal to figure out what's going on, because of course all of this is done secretly. Child pornography is different from, let's say, hate propaganda, where the idea is to spread it as much as you can. With child pornography, child sex trafficking, or child sex tourism, people are trying to do it quietly, without detection, so it involves much more of a police effort.

There's a problem here also, of course, because child victims are not very vociferous victims. They're not visible, and they're not able to articulate or speak up. When somebody robs a grocery store, it's visible and the grocery store clerk is very annoyed, but with a child, it's not visible and the child is unable to speak up. That tends to have an impact on police priorities. They don't get the kind of community pressure about giving this the priority that they should because of its low visibility and the inarticulateness of the victims.

I think there has to be some compensation for that. I think that, frankly, these committee hearings are useful in that respect, because they do give a higher priority to the issue. The committee will finish at some point on this issue, but the Government of Canada continues indefinitely. This is something that the Government of Canada could and should be doing, giving a focus, giving a priority, giving attention, and giving visibility to this issue.

Of course, I believe very much in child leadership, youth consultation, and so on, but this is an area where we can't just leave it to children. I think adults have to compensate in some ways for the fact that many of these victims are simply unable to speak for themselves.

• (1335)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to MP Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Matas, for being here today with us.

You mentioned attention and visibility just now. I wanted to focus my questions on education and socially ingrained values. I'll get to both of them at the same time.

In Southeast Asia, and really, around the world, there are socially entrenched values of marrying off children very early. How do we empower women and young girls? There's an article here that I was

just reading. In Bangladesh, they've saved over 2,000 women from early child marriages. How do we continue that great work?

Mr. David Matas: When you're dealing with cultural values that are contrary to human rights, you need a cultural shift. Obviously, people from Canada can help, but the cultural shift has to come from within.

This is a problem also with female genital mutilation, which is both a human rights violation and sometimes a cultural value as well. What you have to do is build on the opposition that exists locally and try to empower those people.

It's a problem you can see. Sometimes it's even education of girls. There are many parts of the world where it's against the local cultural values to educate girls. This was the situation that Malala was faced with in Pakistan, so the fact that she got a Nobel Peace Prize was very helpful. I think that sort of empowerment of locals who are on the front lines in combatting these cultural values is the way we can carry forward this support and help to shift cultural values. I think the message we want to convey is not that we want them to adopt our values; it is that we want the people who are there, who have these values, to prevail.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I had the opportunity to go to Zimbabwe, and there were a lot of political talks then. There was a lot we disagreed on, but one thing the Canadian government agreed on with the Zimbabwean government was child marriage.

Again, in reference to this article from Bangladesh, there have been 700,000 women who have been empowered and educated and given the opportunity to say no to child marriages, so empowerment is a big aspect.

Do you have any government NGOs in South Asia that have launched awareness campaigns to familiarize those in poor communities regarding the risks of child marriage and trafficking?

• (1340)

Mr. David Matas: I should say that we are concerned, particularly about sexual exploitation. We haven't focused on child marriage in particular. It's been more the commercial sexual exploitation, the prostitution and the child trafficking, and that sort of thing.

We have member organizations in all these countries, and some of them are coalitions in the sense that they are an organization of organizations. Of course, we're funding projects for groups and organizations like the example I gave.

So, yes, there is a lot out there that we're dealing with, but we do have allies and foot soldiers on the ground, so to speak, but it's a constant struggle because there are many people on the other side, unfortunately.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Is there a lot of backlash against those NGOs, those on the ground, for funding these programs, or do you see a lot more support? Do you see some individuals opposing the great work that some of these NGOs are doing?

Mr. David Matas: As I mentioned, there are some difficulties. In dealing with a government, they don't like people outside of government interfering. Let them do their own thing. They don't like the idea of child participation because that, itself, is a cultural shift. They tend to think of children as people who should be told things rather than asked things.

Also, when children start talking, they may not necessarily say everything that you would agree with, so that sometimes raises issues. There is push-back in that sense.

I would say there isn't a concerted lobby in favour of prostitution and child sex trafficking, or child sex tourism. At that level there is general agreement, at least at a policy level, but the problem becomes more in the implementation of how you go about actually changing things. It's one thing to get an agreement in principle that people can just walk away from very happily, but it's another thing to actually implement these changes that sometimes can be disruptive.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us today.

Mr. Sweet had mentioned your earlier good work on organ trafficking in China. I'm just wondering if you run across any issues with organ trafficking in your examination of human trafficking in this area in South Asia? Has that been confined to China, or have you had issues here?

Mr. David Matas: First of all, I thank Mr. Sweet for taking note of that.

I have been involved, in particular, regarding the killing of prisoners of conscience in China for their organs, primarily Falun Gong. There have been others as well—Tibetans, Uighurs, and house Christians—but in much smaller numbers.

I have been focused on China. I am aware of organ trafficking in other countries, including in South Asia, but it's a different phenomenon. In China it is government-run. It's institutionalized. It's in state hospitals. In South Asia it's a black market. It's criminal. To a certain extent it's like sex trafficking in the sense that it's undercover and there is some corruption, but basically it's a different exercise.

Also, a lot of the organ trafficking in South Asia is in kidneys. You can live on one kidney, so some poor people will sell a kidney. Their health is compromised with only one kidney, but they are still functioning and they value the money more than the kidney. That's a problem.

However, it's a different phenomenon in China, where people are executed by organ extraction. They're not given any money. Their family isn't given any money. The money all goes to the state.

• (1345)

Mr. David Anderson: Can I ask a similar question to what Ms. Khalid asked? What is the level of organization around the organ trafficking in that area? Would it be a small group of people around a doctor who would be willing to do this, or is it an international—?

Mr. David Matas: There is a problem. To a certain extent, this is a bit different from child sex trafficking. A lot of the organ trafficking is facilitated through brokers. I came back yesterday from Japan, where I talked about this issue. It happens there through brokers. With child sex trafficking, it isn't much like that. People do their own thing, so to speak, rather than work through an agent. Also, of course they are doing it purposefully and intentionally. Often what happens with brokers is that it's a screen that the patient doesn't look beyond. So the patient doesn't necessarily know exactly what's happening, because the broker paints a picture to facilitate a sale.

Mr. David Anderson: We've had the term “consensual exploitation” used here in the hearings, and it seems people put themselves in situations where they are being exploited. I think that would fit into this.

You talked about your microprojects. I'm wondering how they function. Do you have an issue with corruption or officials interfering with them? Do you find it's easy to establish them and get them under way, and then support the women primarily who are involved in them? Do you have a lot of detail about that?

Mr. David Matas: Although they are child-led and child-run, there are adult youth monitors who function as advisers, so there is a watchful eye over all of this.

Mr. David Anderson: Do the governments stay out of your way and allow you to do these projects, or do you find there's interference from above, where payouts or those kinds of things have to be made for these projects to go ahead?

Mr. David Matas: Of course we wouldn't make a payout if somebody asked for one.

The problem isn't so much that; it's just bureaucracy. You have to get someone's approval, you have to fill out a form, and it has to go to this or that person. It just takes time. The level of bureaucracy and red tape can be very frustrating and delay these projects. Some of the systems in place were presumably put there for good reason, but they just tend to slow things up and drag things down.

Mr. David Anderson: We live with that everywhere.

I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about impunity. You're a lawyer, and I'm just wondering about this. It seems to be a recurring theme in the testimony we've heard, that in so many of these situations it doesn't do any good to try to put a stop to it because there's impunity. People are just not charged. The justice system is too slow to process them.

Do you have any comments on that?

Mr. David Matas: Of course that's a problem everywhere. It's a particular problem in South Asia where the courts are extremely slow. All proceedings seem to take forever. Often what you're dealing with is a conflict of evidence, where the witness on one side is a child and the witness on the other side is an adult. That becomes difficult to deal with. As I say, the law should be there and should be enforced. But I think we need other means of getting at this problem besides just good laws and law enforcement.

Mr. David Anderson: We've heard several times about the importance of educating people, particularly in these countries, about the fact that this is not acceptable. But as a country like India develops a middle class, it changes people's entertainment priorities and interests or whatever. I'm just wondering if you have seen a change in their interest, if you want to call it that, in sexploitation as the middle class has developed. Has that improved the situation? Is it making it worse?

Mr. David Matas: I think it's made it better. One of the things I saw recently when I was in India was government changing the currency. It withdrew all the 5,000 rupee notes—I think it was—which were relatively high denomination notes. The idea was that people were hiding this money and not paying taxes. Whether this should have been done was a matter of much debate, but I heard many people talk about it.

It would be like, in Canada, removing the \$100 bill from circulation. Some people would say it's disruptive. Others would say it would help to control crime because the drug traffickers tend to use them. In fact, we removed the \$1,000 bill exist, for precisely that reason; it was being used in crime a lot.

Just from the conversations I had with people there, the middle class tended to support this measure because they thought it would help deal with tax evasion and crime. The poorer people didn't like it all, because they weren't used to dealing with banks. For them, it was a big inconvenience.

I think this kind of demographic shift is helping shift attitudes.

• (1350)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Matas.

I'm going to take the opportunity to also ask you a few questions, because I know there are some issues that will help in the writing of our report from this study. We've talked a lot about and focused today on India. Does ECPAT have information or programs in smaller states like Bhutan or the Maldives?

Mr. David Matas: We are in 86 countries. I must confess I can't list all 86 countries for you. I'd have to look that up. I could get back to you on it. There are 193 countries now. There are many countries in which we do not have a presence. We don't have comprehensive coverage. We'd like to have it. We could be into more countries.

When I was on the international board, I used to be involved in considering membership applications. We don't just say yes when somebody applies. We have some evaluation criteria. Sometimes we feel people haven't been doing enough work in the area, or they are not knowledgeable enough about the area. There are sometimes problems with the applications. We have to be sure that, when we get an application, the applicant is going to fit within the values and teams and process and so on.

Obviously for the government and the committee in the report, you don't want to focus just on the countries where ECPAT has a presence. It has to be global in nature. It may well be that those countries where we don't have a presence are in even more need of help than the countries in which we do have a presence.

I would say generally that this is an area where there's been increasing public awareness over time. I would say it's been

increasing both in depth and breadth. There are some places where this increasing consciousness has really yet to arrive. I think what the committee and the Government of Canada can usefully do is help to spread this increasing awareness of the abuse and the need to deal with it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Can you describe any international co-operation across South Asian states, when it comes to the enforcement or investigation of these sorts of activities?

Mr. David Matas: Well, there's something called the Bali Process. Canada is involved in the Bali Process, but it basically deals with crimes of trafficking and smuggling in Asia. It doesn't deal specifically with child sex trafficking, but it would be a component of that process.

The Bali Process, I think, is useful as an exchange of information. It is about operatives in the field getting together and exchanging notes, so to speak. I think it's less useful as a policy forum. My own view is that the Bali Process should be changed so that it has more policy content and more collaborative content, so that it's more of a deliberative body, rather than just police officials getting together and exchanging experiences.

Getting any multilateral body to do anything is a big task.

• (1355)

The Chair: That relates to my final question. Has the UN or any of its agencies played a constructive role in the region on the issues that we're addressing with this study?

Mr. David Matas: Well, UNICEF, of course, is an organization for children. Our current director of ECPAT used to work for UNICEF, which has given us some funding. They are supportive and interested. If you're looking at the United Nations, I think UNICEF is a good point of contact.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

With that, we're going to move to the last question from MP Hardcastle.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: My gosh, I get the last question? Okay.

Maybe on that, then, with those relationships, do you have any observations, best practices, or suggestions of ways that we could be addressing the issue of data collection?

Mr. David Matas: ECPAT Luxembourg did a report about best practices around the world, which is in English and French, so you could take a look at that. They did refer to the Beyond Borders' Man-to-Man campaign as a best practice. They referred to many others as well, so there are some. Of course, what Luxembourg was looking at were best practices generally, not just data collection specifically.

ECPAT was founded—I think it was in 1985, something like that. It was quite some time ago now. It has developed quite a lot of experience, had a lot of projects, and written a lot of reports. There's a lot of material out there already.

I would say, though, that this has been largely a private sector initiative. There have been some international conferences that ECPAT has co-sponsored with governments. There was one in Sweden. There was one in Brazil. There was one in Japan. There have been a few over the years, and these international conferences, intergovernmental conferences, have produced some resolutions that are worth looking at.

In fact, the chair mentioned that I was a moderator at three international meetings. One of them was held coincident with the intergovernmental meeting in Brazil. I just went to the ECPAT meeting; I didn't go to the intergovernmental meeting, but I remember its being there. Of course, these intergovernmental meetings are big efforts of organization and involve big expenses. I'm not necessarily sure that's the best way to promote this issue, but I think it's worthwhile to look at what previous intergovernmental meetings have done. I'm not necessarily recommending another one.

I would suggest taking a look at them and even implementing what those previous governmental meetings have approved.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Good.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Matas, I want to thank you again for your valuable testimony before this committee. I suspect that it may not be the last time we have you before us on a range of issues, but I know that your words and insights will be of great value as we move forward with this report.

To the members of this subcommittee, on the chance that we will not sit again on Thursday, I want to wish you all the very best for a busy and productive summer, and certainly I look forward to moving ahead in the fall with the great amount of work we have to do on some very important topics and studies.

I also want to recognize that our fine clerk may be leaving the committee as of this meeting and wish her well in whatever role comes next.

With that, we shall adjourn this meeting of the subcommittee on international human rights.

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