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Fall October, 2016

Sex Trafficking of Women around U.S. Military Bases in South Korea: Impact of New U.S. Laws and Policies Since 2000

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Abstract

Sex Trafficking of Women around U.S. Military Bases in South Korea: Impact of New U.S. Laws and Policies Since 2000

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Interdisciplinary Conference on Human Trafficking
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, October 6-8, 2016

Since the Korean War and permanent stationing of U.S. troops in the Republic of Korea (ROK), U.S. servicemen stationed in the ROK have purchased sex from women trafficked domestically and across international borders to work in bars and clubs surrounding U.S. military bases. For decades, the Department of Defense (DoD) and United States Forces Korea (USFK) denied that U.S. servicemen purchased sex and did not enforce the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Article 138-34 Pandering and Prostitution, which states that buying sex is illegal and punishable by military law. The DoD and USFK did not connect women working in bars and clubs to human trafficking. Their primary concern was providing entertainment to servicemen and ensuring the safety of servicemen who frequented bars and clubs. The welfare of the exploited women was ignored. Since 2000, after the Trafficking Victims Protection Act passed, along with reauthorizations in 2003, 2006, 2008 and 2013, the U.S. military has acknowledged the relationship between sexual exploitation in bars and clubs and human trafficking. Since then, the USFK has increased training on human trafficking and set stricter prevention policies for U.S. servicemen visiting clubs and bars. This paper will present the laws and policies aimed at reducing the trafficking in women around U.S. military bases in South Korea. It will discuss whether efforts made by the USFK have resulted in a decrease in prostitution and sex trafficking around U.S. military bases.

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