

# Ending child sex

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

An estimated 40 000 vulnerable children are exploited through prostitution, writes Erica Webster

**R**ESPONSIBLE tourism is about managing environmental, economic and social issues in such a way that the positives outweigh the negatives. All too often, however, the social implications are overlooked, according to Jennifer Seif, executive director of Fair Trade in Tourism SA (FTTSA).

"The environmental impact of tourism is pretty easy to get one's head around — people have some understanding of issues like climate change, saving electricity and saving water. Most of us also have a fairly good grasp of the economic issues in SA — debates around BEE, job creation, SME development, and so forth.

"Social issues, on the other hand, tend to be less obvious and are often more complex to address, yet they are no less important. As tourism grows it creates risks for vulnerable members of our society such as children and women.

"Of course we want tourism to grow, but we have to make sure that doing so doesn't put people in harm's way."

Although SA as a tourist destination is not strongly associated with child sex tourism, she says high poverty levels and growing inequality suggest that tens of thousands of children are at risk of sexual and other forms of exploitation.

"No official statistics are available, but there could be as many as 250 000 children living on SA's streets — they are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The number of children exploited in prostitution is estimated to be at least 40 000.

"The extent of trafficking in persons in SA is not known, but it is a serious and growing problem both within the country and across its borders."

She says FTTSA's reputation as SA's



LET'S GIVE THE RED CARD TO  
CHILD SEX TOURISM

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Begging the question ... thousands of children are at risk of exploitation.

leading responsible tourism organisation puts it in an ideal position to mobilise SA's tourism sector to protect children.

To this end, FTTSA has spearheaded a new initiative — fight child exploitation in tourism — with support from the UN Children's Fund (Unicef) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

FTTSA's initiative consists of two main elements. First, a campaign on the theme of give the red card to child sex tourism that aims to raise awareness about child protection among tourists and the tourism workforce. Second, a call on the tourism industry to endorse the tourism child protection code of conduct.

The code is endorsed by the UN World Tourism Organisation and many national governments. To date, almost 1 000 companies in about 35 countries have become signatories. In this country, 29 tourism businesses serving more than 10-million

tourists a year, five industry associations and three government departments recently endorsed the code.

"The level of support we received from the private tourism sector was like nothing I've ever experienced before," says Seif.

"The industry is more than ready to embrace its role in protecting children at risk. It's to SA's credit as a leading responsible tourism destination that so many organisations are willing to take this on, and now neighbouring countries also want to come on board."

While the red card campaign was timed to coincide with the Soccer World Cup, Seif says it will not stop there.

"The red card campaign was about much more than just looking good for the World Cup; the sector wants to show the world that we take this issue seriously and will continue to do so.

"And FTTSA will continue to facilitate

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signing of the code, advocacy and raising awareness well beyond 2010.

"Our job is far from over. Although SA has made a commitment to comply with certain internationally recognised standards, no comprehensive antitrafficking in persons legislation exists in the country. Currently, prosecutors must draw on elements of existing laws to prosecute offenders engaging in human trafficking and slavery."

FTTSA is calling for the immediate enactment of the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Bill which was introduced to Parliament in March this year.

Provisions in the bill include the prosecution of people involved in trafficking, protection and assistance of local and foreign victims of trafficking, programmes to prevent trafficking, public awareness programmes and the implementation of effective law-enforcement measures.

Seif says constant advocacy is crucial to fight child exploitation and other human rights abuses.

"Doing so popularises the concepts of socially responsible and sustainable tourism and informs tourists which companies they should be using," she says.