

Good morning, it is with great privilege that GABRIELA Network participates with the Carolina Women's Center. As the only national US-Philippine women's organization in the United States, we are very interested in a lot of the issues that this conference raises, especially in breaking the silence that has long surrounded, and in many ways continues to surround, the issue of trafficking.

GABNet has worked in the area of trafficking for more than 15 years; it was one of the first women's groups to talk about trafficking—even before the government started handing out grants, or beauty magazines made it their campaign of the month, or Lifetime made it the movie of the week. Our work in trafficking started out of the work that we were doing with World War II comfort women, which I will talk about later, and also from the women who approached us—survivors of trafficking, daughters of trafficked women, mail order brides, and others.

We have seen some success, such as getting rid of mail order bride ads in some local papers. Through working with organizations such as Equality Now, we have seen the closure of sex tour agencies and the passage of the International Marriage Broker's Regulation Act. And, though we have scored some victories, there is a long way to go.

The issues of prostitution and sex trafficking are of interest now more than ever in the Philippines, and I would like to first provide an overview of not just the timeliness of this discussion, but also the urgency of it.

Currently, women are the number-one export of the Philippines. This means that the Philippines is the largest exporter of women and that women are the largest product of the country. In the last year alone, more than 750,000 Filipina women left the Philippines searching for better economic conditions, exported to over 168 countries. This has resulted in an estimated \$12 billion in remittance being sent back to the Philippines through both formal and informal channels. The primary reason a Filipina goes abroad is to work as a domestic worker—the second is to become part of the sex trade. There are 150,000 Filipinas in Japan's Giza strip, 20,000 in Europe's sex farms, and over 5,000 mail order brides in the United States. Every day five coffins arrive at Manila's international airport containing the bodies of women who have died while abroad. The inability of the Philippine government to stem the tide of trafficking and the continued export of our women make the president, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and her administration, the most industrious pimps of the Philippines. We call Arroyo's policies on women, prostitution, and trafficking "state sanctioned trafficking."

In fact, we see the rise of trafficking tied to the fact that Filipino women in particular among trafficked women have become a hot commodity, the newest trend if you will—a trend manufactured through stereotypes, pushed through pornography, packaged, and shipped. For those of you who doubt this, let us just look at how we are constantly bombarded with the "normalization" of the sex industry, and with images and stereotypes of Asian women as part of that.

For as long as the Western world has had contact with Asia, there has been the notion of Asian "exoticism." This was apparent from the colonization of Asian countries as well as the first waves of Asian migration to the United States. Asian women were exoticized as the mysterious "other." They were seen as hypersexual and transported to the United States to first fulfill various roles in the sex industries, such as Chinese women who served in brothels during the gold rush. Japanese women would soon arrive to the United States as picture brides to serve as wives to their male counterparts, the first manifestation of the mail order bride. Since then, and despite the various changes in demographics of succeeding waves of immigration, Asian

women have not only continued to be exoticized, but the trend has worsened as the exoticization becoming mainstream.

Thus, a product has been created. But, how does this happen? This is one of the questions that we have asked ourselves, and we don't have to go further than our own communities to get the answer. In an ongoing study within the Filipino-American community, conducted to understand the status of women, we asked what some of the popular stereotypes of Pilipina women are. We learned that there is an image of Filipina women as domestic helpers, as nannies, as prostitutes, as nurses, as gold diggers, and as submissive, but sexually inventive.

The reach of these racist stereotypes range from the seemingly innocuous, such as tourism industry advertisements declaring that the "Philippines is a country with legendary 'hospitality,'" accompanied by pictures of scantily clad brown women serving some type of exotic fruits, to the most obvious endorsements of the sex trade, exemplified by this quote, "*They let you do them any way you want, any hole is up for grabs, then when you wake up after all that, your clothes are washed, and there are fresh mangoes for breakfast. These Filipino girls, they're the best.*" So, in the midst of all of this, you have the sex trade turning Filipina women into the ultimate product in their industry: a woman who is, to borrow from a hip hop song, "A lady in the street and a freak in the bed." In other words, a Filipina is someone who will cook and clean and fuck you any way you want, then slip into the subservient shadows where women like her prefer to be, right?

Utilizing a correct cultural examination, we find that racist assertions of Filipina women as sexually available and consenting, or even preferring prostitution and pornography, are absolutely incorrect. Sex involving monetary exchange was never a component of any indigenous culture of the Philippines. In the more than 150 languages of the Philippines, there is no term for prostitute, prostitution, or even pimp. The practices and language that arose to denote these practices stem from the West, mainly via Spanish colonization, where slang words or foreign words were introduced into the language. For example, the current word in Tagalog for "pimp" is "bugaw," derived from Spanish. The term "bugaw" does not translate directly to "pimp," rather it describes a "person who shoos something or someone" towards a particular direction. With Spanish colonization, many Filipina women were treated as chattel, often "given" as gifts to Spanish priests, landlord families, and other officials.

Throughout Philippine history, the evolution of prostitution was undoubtedly tied to, and cannot be separated from, militarism. The most common example, not just in the Philippines, but in other parts of Asia, such as Korea, Thailand, and Japan, is the case of Japanese "comfort women." The phenomenon of comfort women arose during World War II, where over 250,000 Asian women were taken by the Japanese to supposedly "nurse" soldiers, but were used instead as sexual slave labor, sometimes servicing over 40 men a day. The formalization of the sex trade and prostitution in the Philippines was solidified with the establishment of the Clark Air Base and Subic Navel Base in Central Luzon. These were once some of the largest US Military bases. They were also areas infamous for their red light districts, euphemistically called "rest and recreation" zones.

The presence of these bases fed old stereotypes and created new ones concerning Filipina women (and therefore, Asian women). One of the most infamous examples of this were four letters that began appearing in the general public—on t-shirts, on posters, even as graffiti on the sides of buildings. These letters, "L-B-F-M," stand for "Little Brown Fucking Machines," powered by rice, a sentiment that is the legacy of the American military in the Philippines. They were the same four letters that were used all over Asia, especially during the Vietnam War, where

it was obvious that women and children had been turned into mere objects to be raped, toyed with, and killed as men pleased.

In letters from the Vietnam war, some soldiers reported a preference for using Vietnamese prostitutes because of their sexual prowess; the GIs felt that these Asian women would “save” their pure, American wives from the soldiers’ animal desires. Again, we don’t even have to look at pornography for examples when mainstream Hollywood feature films provide them for us. The scene of the Vietnamese prostitute propositioning four US soldiers in war-torn Vietnam from the movie “Full Metal Jacket” immortalized the expression, “Me love you long time,” a testament to the stereotype of the Asian woman’s appetite for illicit sex.

We cannot separate militarism from prostitution, or from trafficking. The hypersexualized images of are repeated often enough that they are taken as truth. This is why we still have cases where little girls are raped on US military basis, such as the 12-year-old girl in Okinawa who was raped in the late 1990s. This is why we see that rape is a tool of war, such as in Indonesia, where women activists have documented the use of rape as a way to get activists to “get in line” with the new government. This is why last November 2005, six US Marines were accused of gang raping a Filipina in Subic Bay, US Marines who so far have not been tried. This is why sex trafficking is thriving.

*We have reached a point where these mainstream, racist stereotypes are succeeding in replacing the truth of Asian women and culture. It is no longer enough that many men simply view these pornographic stereotypes; it has now become very much in fashion to enact what is thought of as “Asian” practices, practices that in actuality derive from fictional media such as anime, video games, and internet representations. This deranged ideation of Asian culture is not just projected onto expectations of women’s dress and behavior, but also onto other aspects of the sex industry. For example, “China Nympho Crème” is advertised to make one’s vagina small and tight, like an Asian woman’s.*

The insertion of these notions of Filipina women into the mainstream are quite simply the way in which sex trafficking is promoted and practiced in such astounding numbers. For instance, a former sex tour operator in Los Angeles used pornography as his main method of marketing for his sex tours. A man interested in a sex tour would receive an “introductory packet” of materials, including pornographic tapes and pictures that supposedly depicted what was awaiting him should he go on the sex tour.

But, it is not just that these stereotypes exist that fuels sex trafficking. It is also because even with all of the attention being focused now on trafficking, there is still an amazing amount of silence around it. For example, I shouldn’t be the one up here talking to you about what it is like for women in the Philippines who are trafficked. A women who has had that experience should be the one telling her story. But, she isn’t. And, it doesn’t have to do with logistics—that she cannot get here from the Philippines—but everything to do with this issue of silence, of taboo.

The women who are trafficked are like the women who were sexual slaves, euphemistically called “comfort women” after World War II. When these brave women spoke out, many of them were accused of lying, of making up stories to get money from the Japanese government. It was one of the worst examples of victim blaming.

Do we treat women who are trafficked any better? While we are improving with tools like T-visas and law enforcement becoming more educated, women who are victims are still vulnerable to deportation and further trauma, such as having to testify against their traffickers. In many cases, women are afraid of retribution against themselves and those that they love. And

it's not an unfounded fear, as many people have had family members threatened. Especially in a country like the Philippines, you learn early on as a woman that to stand up is to be vulnerable to being shot down—literally. Even in the case where women are willing to speak about their abuse, they are quickly shushed. Maria Fe Ocampo, a Filipina woman who was raped while in the employment of a foreign ambassador, was told by the Philippine government, “Just go home back to the Philippines and try to forget any of this ever happened to you. You don't want to cause any problems, do you?”

Because of the taboos that exist around the issue of trafficking, many women who are able to get help want to slip quietly into the background. They do not want to speak up and declare themselves trafficked women—prostitutes, slaves, or even mail order brides. There are too many bad examples of what happens to women who speak out: for example, one of the first Filipina women to ever label herself a mail order bride was Susana Rimerata Blackwell from Seattle, who, while attempting to divorce her abusive husband and fearful that he would abuse their soon to be born child, was killed in court. The judge in the case sympathized with the murderer for the “stress” that he must be under due to such accusations. The exoticism of Filipinas is not cultural, but the shame, the taboo, and the silence around trafficking is.

I cannot stress enough that trafficking does not happen in a vacuum. It is not surprising that it is such an epidemic in the Philippines. The Philippines is a country rife with corruption and a government whose imperialist interests take precedence over its people. The selling of its women is symptomatic of a country that has long been export-oriented and import-dependent. Even as strides in the women's movement punch holes in the fabric of government corruption and inability to protect Filipina women, Philippine President Macapagal Arroyo has time and again been the biggest roadblock on this road to justice.

President Arroyo in fact has used the women's movement as target practice for some time. In July of 2005, President Arroyo was caught cheating in the elections on palace phones that she herself had ordered wiretapped. The first organizations to call for her to step down were women's groups. The outcry against her cheating has even led to impeachment proceedings. What has President Arroyo's reaction been? Her response has been to call a state of national emergency, akin to martial law under dictator Marcos. She has even gone so far as to charge Liza Maza, the only congresswoman officially representing the women's sector as a part of the GABRIELA Women's Party, with “rebellion,” a bail-less charge with a maximum of life in prison.

This charge is part of a charge against six progressive representatives in the Philippine Congress. For almost four weeks now, these six congresspeople have been held in custody in the House of Representatives. If the Philippine government under Arroyo does not hesitate at jailing its own congressional representatives without warrants, keeping them locked within the very halls of Congress, sleeping on conference room floors, unable to leave without being threatened by heavily armed guards, and keeping them from their families for an indefinite amount of time—if the Philippine government allows human rights to be trampled in such a fashion, is it really a surprise that it facilitates the widespread sale of its own women and children?

So, what do we do or what are we doing? I don't think that it would behoove us to discuss this and not have ways to fight it or at least plans in place. Of course, these are our first steps—being able to raise awareness and shed light on the topic, to continue this discussion, amongst ourselves and others, bringing to light our ideas and the information this conference will provide.

The second is to challenge policies, legislators, and others to take a stand and match anti-trafficking laws that have been created in other countries. Because of the nature of trafficking, we cannot have one-sided legislation—it doesn't make sense. Congresswoman Liza Maza, who I mentioned earlier, is currently under house arrest. She is the congresswoman whom the Philippine Government has branded a "rebel," but she is also the author of one of the first anti-trafficking bills in Asia and a co-author of the Violence Against Women Law in the Philippines. The effectiveness of such legislation will only be as strong as other transnational agreements that vow to match it.

The third is to expand and broaden our movement so that we truly are building a militant sisterhood. We do this by stepping outside of our comfort zones—to speak out even when we are faced with great adversity. That is when it becomes even more important that we talk. When GABNet led the first demonstrations in front of Philippine consulates across the United States in protest to the declaration of 1017, de facto Martial Law, I was in Los Angeles. We displayed a big banner that read, "No return to Martial Law." It was huge, and despite the strong winds and biting cold, we tried to hold it steady. What we noticed was that many people did not want to engage—either to argue with us or agree with us. Then in the afternoon, an older woman approached us. She stood by one of our members and then whispered, "Is it safe? You are very brave to hold that sign. It takes courage." We nodded and started to tell her about what was happening. She interrupted and whispered, "My daughter died. Fighting. You are very brave." And then she left. And all at once, the wind did not seem so sharp.

It also means that the silence is broken by forming solidarity with organizations such as those represented here because we recognize that international solidarity has to be formed for us to fight those things that strengthen the industry of prostitution and human trafficking.

I would like to close in the words of one of GABRIELA Network's founders, author and activist Ninotchka Rosca: "At this time, we cannot afford to vacillate, we cannot afford to waver, we are dealing with much more than policies and resolutions and even conference declarations. We are dealing with human lives, of children and of women."

And thus, we must continue our work, our discussion, and our direct support of these campaigns, realizing that our struggle is part of a global movement for human rights and social justice.