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Innocents at Risk.

## Innocents at Risk Fights the Scourge of Child Trafficking

ESTABLISHED IN 2005 BY DEBORAH SIGMUND, Innocents at Risk is dedicated to protecting children from Exploitation and Child Trafficking. Working to raise awareness of the horrors of child trafficking, Innocents at Risk has built partnerships with the Department of State, corporations working to end trafficking, embassies, organizations, churches, law enforcement, and schools to help prevent the Trafficking of Women and Children.

When people hear the term ‘Child Trafficking,’ they usually think of something on the other side of the world. Unfortunately, Child Trafficking is in every state in

the US and in every corner of the world. The Trafficking of Children is the fastest growing criminal industry in the world. It is a \$150 Billion Business annually! It is more lucrative than the drug trade. Why? In order to get into drug trafficking, one needs cash; to get into Child Trafficking, one just needs a child.

Innocents at Risk began by sponsoring Awareness Events in the US and abroad to open the eyes of people everywhere about Child Trafficking. Involving the diplomatic and consular community was essential to addressing the transnational aspect of Child Trafficking. Embassies hosted events

where we invited speakers from the Department of State, the National Center of Missing and Exploited Children, the National Human Trafficking Hotline run by the Polaris Project, and Shared Hope International.

In 2008, a senior flight attendant for American Airlines heard about the Awareness Events sponsored by Innocents at Risk and contacted us. She said, “We see what you are talking about on planes and in the airports and we don’t know what to do about it.” The staff at Innocents at Risk realized immediately that the worldwide network of flight attendants was a natural partner in the fight to prevent Human Trafficking. They responded to her inquiry, letting her know that Innocents at Risk would work with them to solve that problem. Innocents at Risk produced a brochure giving Flight Attendants the knowledge of what to look for and the protocol for reporting a red flag situation. This partnership resulted in a



Deborah Sigmund, (standing second from left) visiting the children at Niños de Cristo, Dominican Republic

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tremendous breakthrough in identifying potential victims and saving lives. In 2009, the Department of Homeland Security supported our initiative by putting out an undated protocol. This DHS Protocol is still in effect and saves thousands of lives annually.

Empowering flight attendants to recognize and help prevent the transport of human trafficking victims across international lines represents one critical way that Innocents at Risk has worked to save children from the horrors of Child Trafficking. Sharing information and partnering with embassies, the Departments of State and Homeland Security, and other NGO's has also helped to rescue young victims and capture human traffickers. While both of these areas of concentration have made substantial differences, human traffickers find many creative ways to procure more young victims.

In 2010, Deborah Sigmund began working with the Dominican Ambassador to the US to protect children in



Deborah Sigmund (R) with colleagues at the State Department

his country. It had come to the attention of the Dominican government that children were being “adopted” from orphanages by human traffickers. Orphanages needed to close their doors to adoptions to keep their children safe. Not only did the Dominican Republic seek assistance in combatting the trafficking rings that filled their supply chain with orphans, but the orphanages also needed help in caring for the children they vowed to keep and protect.

In response to this terrible situation, Innocents at Risk partnered with a humanitarian association of flight



attendants known as the Airline Ambassadors, founded by Nancy Rivard. That year, Deborah Sigmund and Nancy Rivard traveled together to the Dominican Republic with Airline Ambassadors to visit orphanages. During that trip, the group from Innocents at Risk and Airline Ambassadors fell in love with the Orphanado Niños de Cristo. As a result of that visit, Sona Hane, Director of Niños de Cristo, has become a vital partner of Innocents at Risk, working with local law enforcement to keep the children safe. Since that initial visit, representatives of both Airline Ambassadors and Innocents at Risk have continued to visit the children of Niños de Cristo, providing support, meals, medical attention, computers, books, bedding, a playground, clothes, toys, and other necessities.

The US Government and governments around the world have dedicated officials working with law enforcement to help end this horrific evil. It is important for governments to work with the private sector, NGOs, organizations like Innocents at Risk, law enforcement, corporations, religious groups, communities and individuals! The media is doing its part to bring awareness to the public, but we need to create a sense of urgency in order to protect children.

Heroes on Capital Hill are working to fight Human Trafficking. In the past 2 years, over 100 bills have been introduced in the U.S. House and Senate to combat human trafficking. The strong bipartisan support of this type of legislation underscores the importance of coming to terms with these terrible crimes being committed in the US every day. Innocents at Risk has worked tirelessly and continues to work with Members of Congress to protect children and put traffickers out of business.



Deborah Sigmund training taxi cab drivers on how to recognize the red flags of possible trafficking

Innocents at Risk also works to help prevent international Child Trafficking, as well. Our awareness DVD has been used at every major embassy and at many consulates throughout the United States as an educational resource. Working with the Department of State's Bureau

their young victims. Consuls have an important role to play, as well. Identifying a trafficker among the many legitimate citizens looking for services can truly save lives. Learning to recognize the warning signs like a "family member" coming into a consulate seeking to replace a child's "lost documents" is essential. Taking the desperate phone call of parents seriously when they report that their child has gone missing is essential. Reporting these kinds of things immediately to the local law enforcement and working hand in hand with them will help to prevent the trafficking of yet another young victim and put the perpetrators behind bars, where they belong.

Innocents at Risk salutes all the work that is being done to Prevent Child Trafficking! We all agree that much more needs to be done, and that it takes all of us working together. As Awareness is Prevention, we are asking YOU to help us spread awareness, keep your own eyes open, and create an environment where no child will ever be bought or sold. Together we can, and we must, protect the innocent everywhere. In the name of children, please join us keep all children safe. ■



Deborah Sigmund with Nancy Rivard and other Flight Attendants in Phoenix AZ for a major Training for Airline Crews. Deborah also invited DHS/ICE to attend, and Deborah recognized the ICE officers as Heroes, because they meet the planes and take the woman or child out of danger.

of Consular Affairs, Office of Children's Issues and with other international organizations, we reach out to all levels of governments to inform them about the scourge of Child Trafficking and to train them to recognize it in time to save

### DID YOU KNOW?

**IN 2013 AMERICAN MOTHERS INTERNATIONAL NAMED DEBORAH SIGMUND THE METROPOLITAN D.C. AREA MOTHER OF THE YEAR. AT HER SPEECH IN NEW YORK CITY, DEBORAH INFORMED MOTHERS FROM EVERY STATE ABOUT THE HORRORS OF CHILD TRAFFICKING. IMMEDIATELY, DEDICATED MOTHERS IN EVERY STATE GOT ON BOARD! TODAY, WE HAVE AN ARMY OF MOTHERS THAT HAVE BECOME A MAJOR THREAT TO TRAFFICKERS!**