

AMERICAN BAPTIST RESOLUTION AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

One of the most enduring images we have of children in the New Testament comes when Jesus gathers the children to him saying, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs" (Luke 18:16 NRSV).

The biblical witness admonishes anyone who would hinder a child's growth or well-being. Most vividly, Jesus said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6 NRSV). The sexual exploitation of children is a sin against God and a blight on the human spirit. When base sexual desire targets a child for pleasure or profit or both, that child experiences a physical, psychological and spiritual wound that takes years to heal, if ever.

The buying and selling of children for sex is often expressed in child prostitution and "child" pornography. These abuses promote and further crimes of kidnapping, abandonment and murder. The Apostle Paul says, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil..." (1 Timothy 6:10 NRSV) In this case, profiteering is certainly a driving force behind this inhumanity to children. The ultimate damage done to these ravaged children is beyond imagination. Their chances for a reasonably well-adjusted life are diminished, if not destroyed. They lose their health. They lose their ability to trust others. They lose hope. They may even lose their lives.

There is overwhelming evidence of the commercial sexual exploitation of children in virtually every country of the world. In the United States, hundreds of thousands of children are believed to be sexually exploited through prostitution and pornography. The factors driving child prostitution in this country are poverty, growing economic disparities, severe stress on families, drug abuse and rampant consumerism. The majority of children involved in street prostitution are runaways, who have often suffered incest, rape, or abuse at home. They are driven into prostitution by poverty or the need to make money for drug habits or consumer goods otherwise out of their reach. In addition, the United States is one of the industrialized countries that is a primary point of origin for sex tours to Asia and Latin America. In the past, Americans have led the list of sex exploiters who have been arrested, convicted, imprisoned, deported or otherwise found guilty of child sex crimes.

On an international scale, helpless children are being made victims of the desires and deceit of adults. Children are exploited as objects of pornography or prostitution, exposing these children to infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Some communities and parents believe that children are a commodity that can be traded for gain. The children themselves are tricked into a life of sexual slavery by promises of a better future and a good job.

Too often adults fail to protect the children entrusted to them from predators, like pedophiles, who travel to other countries to seek greater access to youthful prostitutes. Sadly, law enforcement officials fail to do so as well. In addition, many countries cannot or will not enforce laws against sexual abuse of children.

The American Baptist Churches USA condemns and deplores the sexual exploitation of children through prostitution or pornography as an affront to the will of God and a crime against humanity. We call upon the entire American Baptist family to do what is within its power to prevent and to end the sacrifice of the world's children through pornography or prostitution by:

INDIVIDUALS:

- Living a life motivated by Christian love for God, self and neighbor;
- Calling on any American Baptist or anyone participating in or profiting from child prostitution or child pornography to repent and forsake these evils.

COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS:

- Working in our communities for the well-being of children and families;
- Raising awareness in our own communities with regard to these issues both by identifying agencies, organizations and businesses that facilitate or profit from child prostitution or pornography and demanding that their complicity in such activities cease.
- Asking travel agencies to avoid bookings in hotels that are known to cater to child prostitution;

ABCUSA:

- Supporting American Baptist efforts through our mission agencies to prevent exploitation of children, in part by dealing with the conditions in our society and around the world that cause such exploitation. This support also includes assistance for children recovering from or leaving situations of sexual exploitation.
- Calling on International Ministries, National Ministries and Regions to increase American Baptists' awareness of this problem and enable them to address it.
- Continuing to support the work of End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT) through International Ministries.
- Raising this issue with ABC USA constituency and partners, both domestic and international, soliciting their prayers regarding child prostitution and pornography and calling on them to work together with us in ending these crimes.
- Supporting legislation that protects the rights of children.

U.S. GOVERNMENT:

- Urging the U.S. government to develop and enact legislation to protect the rights of children.
- Urging the U.S. government to use every means at its disposal seek to eradicate the sexual exploitation of children through prostitution and pornography in the U.S. and around the world.

FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS:

· Using whatever channels are available to communicate to foreign governments the ABC USA's support of the U.S. law to help end child prostitution. (Grassly Amendment, Title XV - Child pornography)

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - June 1999

119 Yes, 1 No, 0 Abstentions

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Policy Base

American Baptist Policy Statement on Health, Healing and Wholeness

American Baptist Policy Statement of Family Life

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights
