

## **“Win A Wife” contest ‘unfortunate, misguided’: Anti-traffic Coalition**

*For immediate release:*

Anti-human trafficking groups nation-wide are speaking out against a radio-station contest where the prize is “a hot foreign chick” for a wife.

The *BEAR*, an Edmonton rock station, is partnering with an American mail-order bride company. The prize is a trip to Russia with 13 nights’ accommodation, air fare, and spending money – “to meet the lucky lady!”

The anti-trafficking coalition includes groups from across the country. In a joint statement they say: “The contest sends a message of inherent disregard for human dignity - which creates the atmosphere in which human trafficking, exploitation and slavery can thrive.”

“Often in the spirit of fun, mistakes are made that perpetuate existing wrongs, or create lasting harm,” says Jacqueline Linder of the Chrysalis Network. “This is a teaching opportunity – to reinforce that people are not for sale, trade or auction.”

“The concept that a human being could be a “prize” carries us back two hundred years to an era we hoped we had closed in Canada: that of slavery,” says Christina Harrison Baird, Chair of PACT-Ottawa (Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking in Humans). “Such so-called give-aways stand in stark contrast with the work of law enforcement and many groups in our communities, to bring a final stop to modern forms of slavery.”

“The idea that a person could be viewed as a “prize” or a “thing” is to completely strip them of their dignity and worth as a human; reducing them to just that – a thing, or an object,” says Shae Invidiata, of Toronto-based Free-Them. “It demonstrates the ownership and control one must have over this person in order to be even capable of offering them up.

“The contest compels Canadians to ask how the women in Russia are recruited into this. Is it through force, fraud, coercion or deception?” says Andrea Burkhart of ACT Alberta. “We do know that many women are pushed and pulled into trafficking markets in the hopes of attaining a better life. This is an opportunity for all Canadians to think twice about systems

that exploit vulnerabilities, including online marriage companies or “mail-order brides.”

“The issue of trafficking in women has devastating consequences not only for the women who are bought and sold into slavery each day across Canada, but for all Canadians.” Says Jolene Stowell, Human Trafficking Coordinator of The Women’s Support Network, York Region.

Alberta's Immigration Minister has pulled his department’s advertising from the station. Thomas Lukaszuk says the promotion is "in poor taste," and he says he won’t use taxpayers dollars to support it.

Law enforcement officials estimate approximately two thousand international victims are trafficked into and through Canada each year. Statistics for domestically trafficked victims are currently unknown.

In addition to ongoing investigations, there were at least 46 human trafficking cases prosecuted by courts as of late February 2011. These cases involved 68 accused trafficking offenders and 80 victims.

These cases likely represent only a fraction of the actual number of human trafficking cases. Due to threats, violence or coercion, most trafficking victims are unable to come forward. In addition, these statistics do not include a growing number of domestic trafficking cases involving Canadian women and girls.

Trafficked persons require a range of support services, including healthcare and counseling, housing, income or employment support, legal aid and translation services. Most of these social services fall within provincial responsibility. While some provincial governments like Alberta and B.C. have established lead agencies for trafficked persons to access such services, others have yet to take such action.

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## Chrysalis Anti-Human Trafficking Network

<http://www.chrysalisnetwork.org/>



[www.pact-ottawa.org](http://www.pact-ottawa.org)



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