

Sex Trafficking and Human Rights in Minnesota

Noon – 1 p.m. | Briggs and Morgan, Minneapolis
October 14, 2008

Briggs and Morgan, Professional Association and The Advocates for Human Rights co-present the Women's Human Rights Speaker Series. This month's presentation on October 14 will focus on sex trafficking and human rights in Minnesota.

Sex trafficking violates women and children's basic human rights, including the right to be free from slavery and slavery-like practices; the right to equal protection under the law; the right to be free from discrimination based on race, nationality and gender; and the rights to life, security of person and freedom from torture. Governments also violate trafficked persons' rights when they fail to prevent sex trafficking, prosecute perpetrators or provide trafficked persons with effective remedies for these violations, such as access to courts and legal immigration status.

At the request of the State of Minnesota's Human Trafficking Task Force, The Advocates for Human Rights has prepared and published a needs assessment on sex trafficking in Minnesota. The report examines the government's response to this issue at the local, state, tribal and federal levels; identifies facilities and services currently available to trafficking victims in Minnesota, and assesses their effectiveness; and makes recommendations for coordinating services to better meet statewide needs. Cheryl A. Thomas and Angela Bortel, two authors of the report, will discuss these findings and recommendations, and the importance of implementing responses that prioritize the safety and autonomy of trafficked persons while continuing to hold traffickers and patrons accountable.

About the Speakers

Cheryl A. Thomas is an attorney and director of the Women's Human Rights Program, a program she founded at The Advocates for Human Rights (formerly Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights) in 1993. Since 1994, Thomas has traveled throughout Central and Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union countries and Morocco to work with local groups and individuals to promote women's human rights. She has published numerous articles and reports on violence against women as a human rights abuse. Thomas was honored as a 2005 Changemaker by Minnesota Women's Press. In 2008, she was selected to be one of 15 experts from around the world to participate in a United Nations Expert Group Meeting on good practices in legislation on violence against women. After receiving her law degree from the University of Minnesota, Thomas practiced law at the Minnesota Attorney General's office and was a partner at Briggs and Morgan. She was an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota Law School where she taught Women's International Human Rights from 1996 - 2002. From 1999 to 2001 she served as executive director of WATCH, a court monitoring organization focused on cases of violence against women and children.

Angela Bortel is a staff attorney in the Women's Program with an extensive background in combating trafficking in persons. She graduated from law school at the University of California - Berkeley, Boalt Hall. While in law school, she founded and oversaw a legal advocacy project at SAGE in San Francisco. Her work there included helping the nascent anti-trafficking program by conducting legal trainings for public prosecutors and district attorneys, as well as being a member of the Bay Area Anti-Trafficking Coalition. Prior to law school, Bortel was a U.S. State Department/IREX Fellow in Moscow, where she attended Moscow State University and volunteered with numerous nonprofit women's groups such as the Angel

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Coalition, an anti-trafficking coalition. Her work in Russia included training women's groups, working with trafficking victims and helping draft proposed anti-trafficking legislation.