**Op-Ed – Jordan Rollins**

**“Human Trafficking: Why is it such an important Women’s Issue?” by Louise Shelly & “Sin, Salvation, or Starvation? The Problematic Role of Religious Morality in U.S. Anti-Sex Trafficking Policy” by Lucinda Peach**

Human Rights issues often fly under the radar and do not receive the attention they deserve. This may be because they are almost always far from pleasant and reading or hearing about them could be considered a “downer.” The good folks who bring us the nightly news may prefer to cover a “feel good” story instead of dedicating time to a human rights violation because “feel good” is better for ratings. In a way, if the majority of people do not want to ponder a “downer” as soon as they walk in the door from work, the decision to bring us a story about a celebrity who, prompted through Twitter, agreed to go to the prom with a high school student makes sense. Give the people what they want, get the ratings, maybe even a raise, and everybody wins. So, it comes as no surprise that when “boring” is paired with a “downer” by addressing policy issues surrounding human rights violations many people would prefer to spend their valuable time consuming elsewhere. I would like to pose, perhaps bluntly, that this mindset is self-serving, insensitive, and while it may not directly contribute to problems linked with human rights violations, it certainly does nothing to help those individuals affected. Having said that, I will now proceed in discussing policy as it pertains to the issue of human sex-trafficking.

We live in a global society increasingly driven by the age-old principle of supply and demand. Unfortunately, rising global poverty has driven many individuals and groups to migrate into other countries in search of a better life. Migrants are already among the most vulnerable in any population and as sexism continues to enjoy an existence in which it remains virtually unchallenged in many countries, it contributes to a growing supply source of migrant women who often become targeted by sex traffickers. The demand is simple. Why is the sex industry an industry? Why does it need traffickers? Men want sex and everyone wants money.

Forced into prostitution, a woman’s life is no longer her own. Made available to any man who, on a casual whim, perhaps after a nice lunch, decides he’d like to pay a visit to a brothel, she is often subjected to violence, degradation, and objectification. If that were not enough, she is also at a high risk for contracting venereal diseases. I am not confident that I could begin to adequately convey the psychological and emotional distress many women in such circumstances endure, so I will make no attempt to do so here. Some women do choose to engage in prostitution. That decision is often made in an attempt to alleviate conditions brought about by poverty. It is important to understand that just because a woman may choose prostitution, it does not mean that she is safe from the dangers that accompany sex-work.

Simply put, the demand for sex has put many women around the world in situations that are dangerous and life threatening. As for the first thing that needs to be addressed from a policy standpoint, how they found themselves in these situations is completely irrelevant. People need help. We should help these people. This should come first and should be followed by policy efforts to fight the conditions that put women in danger to begin with. Because this is a global problem, it cannot be fixed by throwing a big American policy blanket over it. U.S. policies and regulations are quite rigid. They should be made more adaptable and adjusted to work effectively in a cultural context from country to country. Often, our policies condemn when they are supposed to help. By trying to impose our views of sex regulation on other countries, we can actually make things worse for sex workers, who clearly have enough to worry about. We must recognize cultural, religious, economic, and political differences and adjust policy accordingly if we truly want to make an effective positive impact.