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Kristi House Chosen to Participate in World Congress III

Kristi House Children's Advocacy Center Program Coordinator Sandy Skelaney was chosen as one of 15 delegates from the United States to join nearly 3,000 people from five continents in Brazil for the World Congress III against the Sexual Exploitation of Children. It will be taking place November 25 to November 28 in Rio de Janeiro.

The World Congress is organized by the Brazilian Government in partnership with ECPAT International (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes), UNICEF and the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The First World Congress took place in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1996 and the Second one was in 2001, in Yokohama, Japan.

Kristi House began its initiative in 2007 to coordinate a system of care for children being exploited in prostitution and pornography in Miami-Dade County. Commercial sexual exploitation is a severe form of human trafficking affects up to 300,000 American children and thousands of foreign nationals annually. The connection between child sexual abuse and CSEC is strong with estimates as high as 80 to 90% of child victims of sex trafficking having been sexually and/or physically abused in the home.

Kristi House's Sandy Skelaney has emerged as a local leader on this issue by creating the Commercially Sexually Exploited Children's Project at Kristi House. The program combines a prevention curriculum aimed at empowering and raising awareness among at-risk girls, with intervention and rehabilitation services that assist those who are in need of case coordination and therapy.

Throughout the three-day World Congress, workshops and intensive discussions will focus around five key areas: forms of commercial sexual exploitation and its new scenarios, legal framework and accountability, integrated cross-sector policies, initiatives of social responsibility and strategies for international cooperation.

Congress organizers see it as being practical, solution-driven and innovative; promoting a genuine dialogue and exchange of good practices; setting practical targets; and fostering new cooperation between governments, civil society and the private sector. The outcomes document that will be created and agreed upon by world governments will be a tool to guide the public and private sectors in preventing and caring for all children being exploited in the sex industry.

"Sexual exploitation of children is a crime against humanity, and one that knows no boundaries," said Sandy Skelaney. "American and foreign-born children are being exploited by the hundreds in our own backyards, right here in Miami. The damage it causes to its victims is hard to over-estimate."

According to the 2007 UN Study on Violence Against Children, sexual exploitation of children and adolescents is on the rise. In addition, trafficking in human beings - many of whom are children - is now considered one of the most lucrative and fastest growing transnational criminal industries, worth some US\$ 10 billion a year to its perpetrators according to some estimates.

Kristi House is located on the University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Hospital campus at 1265 NW 12 Ave. Its south facility is located on U.S. 1 and 152nd St. and its north facility is located at 18441 NW 2nd Ave. Founded in 1996, Kristi House has served more than 7,000 victims of child sexual abuse and their families. Thousands more are reached every year with education and prevention outreach programs. Services include case coordination/case management, therapy, comprehensive assessments, transportation, advocacy and emergency assistance. Visit www.kristihouse.org for more details.

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