



## The United States Mission to the OSCE

Office of Public Affairs

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### **Ms. Lauran Bethell**

Global Consultant, International Ministries

Lauran Bethell, M.Div, D.D., has been working for nearly two decades on behalf of, and caring for exploited and abused women. She has worked extensively with grassroots organizations, encouraging the development of new projects dealing with the issues of prostitution, trafficking in persons and other forms of abuse and exploitation. While based in Prague, Czech Republic, she has traveled extensively throughout Europe, Asia, the Middle East and the Americas, teaching, training and consulting with faith-based civil society.

As the first Director of the New Life Center in Chiang Mai in the north of Thailand (1987), Lauran pioneered projects in Southeast Asia that specifically addressed the issue of child prostitution and trafficking of women and children. The Center was started with 18 residents in an effort to offer young tribal women an opportunity to receive an education and vocational training which provided alternatives to prostitution and other forms of exploitation. Lauran directed the Center for 14 years; at various times, there have been as many as 200 girls and young women in the Center's 4 houses in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. The Center also sponsors at-risk girls who are attending schools in their villages or living in hostels. Though the work primarily focuses on preventing girls with high-risk factors from being exploited, the Center also offers rehabilitation and life alternatives to women who have come out of prostitution and other exploitative situations.

The New Life Center has received international recognition and awards for its work, and has been the subject of many television documentaries as well as newspaper and magazine articles. In 1995, Lauran received an award on behalf of the New Life Center from the Prime Minister of Thailand. The Center also hosted former U.S. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

In January 2001, Lauran began working full-time as an international consultant with the goal of initiating and encouraging new grass-roots projects to address the exploitation and abuse of women and children, many of whom are victims of trafficking. In August 2004, Lauran directed the first "International Consultation on Ministry with Women in Prostitution" bringing together from 25 countries the leaders of faith-based organizations involved in this work. A second conference was held in April 2006 with representatives from 36 countries.

Lauran was honored with the Human Rights Award of the Baptist World Alliance, which was presented in 2005 by President Jimmy Carter. She serves on the Anti-Trafficking Committee of the European Baptist Federation (EBF), providing resources to EBF churches in an effort both to prevent trafficking and offer care to victims. In 2004, she also initiated "Project Hope" in Prague, working with Bulgarian Roma women involved in prostitution, many of whom are trafficked.

Lauran has collaborated with governmental agencies and non-government organizations, including a broad spectrum of faith-based groups and organizations. Because of her personal contact with hundreds of women involved in prostitution and victims of trafficking and her development of new projects, Lauran has been invited to testify before U.S. House of Representatives (2005) and Senate (2000) committees, as they drafted and revised the U.S. anti-trafficking legislation.



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The Rev. Dr. Luran Bethell is originally from California, USA. After graduating with a B.A. in psychology, religion and education from the University of Redlands, she taught elementary school in Central California (6 years) and then at the Hong Kong International School (4 years). She returned to the U.S. to complete a Masters of Divinity (M.Div.) from the American Baptist Seminary of the West; from which she was later awarded a Doctor of Divinity (D.D) for her work on behalf of women in Southeast Asia.