

**Breaking News – Thursday 8 July 2010**

## **Ireland being used as 'gateway' for child sex traffickers:**

Child sex traffickers are increasingly turning to Ireland as a gateway into Britain, a report claimed today.

Slave traders are switching their attention to the Irish Sea because of a security clampdown on so-called classic routes through airports and from France, it said.

Children as young as three years old are being bought and sold for sex, as domestic servants and for forced marriages.

The report by international child protection organisation Ecpat commended the UK for “notable efforts” in fighting child trafficking, but said Ireland had only made “some progress”.

And while Ireland was doing better than some other European countries such as Sweden or Greece, campaigners pointed out it was lagging at the bottom of the progress rankings.

Ecpat said Ireland was also considered a destination for trafficked children as well as a transit country to the UK.

“Traffickers are finding getting through the ‘classic’ routes into Britain - ferries from France or through the larger London airports – increasingly difficult due to heightened security,” the report said.

“So they are now looking to other points of entry, with the border crossing between Northern Ireland and the Republic being used, as well as the Ireland-Wales ferry crossings.”

Other key findings were:

Children between three and 17 years of age are trafficked into Ireland, for sexual exploitation, as domestic slaves and forced brides.

No reliable figures exist for the numbers involved but victims’ groups warn it is a growing problem – The Immigrant Council of Ireland said 11 children were trafficked over a 21 month period in 2007 to 2008.

The report quotes a “senior Garda source” that gangs are increasingly targeting children taken into the care on arrival in Ireland.

Some 503 children have gone missing from care since 2000, of whom 441 remain missing.

Ireland is a source country for tourists travelling to destinations such as the Philippines and Thailand to have sex with children.

On the back of the findings, the Children's Rights Alliance (CRA) launched a global petition, along with the Body Shop, demanding tougher laws against traffickers and better support for victims.

Jillian van Turnhout, CRA chief executive, said while the Government has made some progress, the country was languishing among the bottom EU states for fighting child exploitation.

"Why are we not up there with the UK in protecting our children from this vile practice?" she said.

"The reason we're not up there, is because the State is not identifying the crime, we don't have clear systems in place to help a child who has been trafficked or who is at risk of being trafficked."

Ms van Turnhout dismissed a national plan of action against trafficking as merely aspirational.

"I have heard heart-breaking stories, including stories of children being trafficked in Sligo, Kilkenny, Cork, Dublin," she said.

"There is a reluctance to acknowledge that this very modern slave trade is happening here in Ireland.

"The Government must do more to guarantee children and young people their right to protection from traffickers who profit from the misery they inflict on children."

The CRA is asking people to trace their hand onto a petition at local Body Shop outlets as part of the campaign supported by celebrities Sienna Miller, Ben Kingsley, Yoko Ono and Joanna Lumley.