



## National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum NAPAWF

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November 22, 2005

Ki Mae Heussner  
Manager, Public Affairs  
Lifetime Television  
309 West 49<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10019

Dear Ms. Heussner:

I am writing on behalf of the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF), a national advocacy and membership organization committed to building an Asian Pacific American (APA) women's movement among those who believe in advancing social justice, and addressing the concerns and increasing the rights of APA women and girls. Because human trafficking greatly impacts our community, where one-third of all victims trafficked globally are from Asia, our members and staff have educated communities and policymakers, and worked with advocacy organizations around the country to address the plight of human trafficking victims.

On October 24 and 25, 2005, and subsequent replays of the miniseries on later dates, our members across the country watched the Lifetime miniseries "Human Trafficking" [miniseries] and were deeply disturbed. While we applaud your efforts to raise public awareness about human trafficking, we find it disempowering for victims and advocates to inaccurately represent the prevalence of the problem in Asia or the true dimensions of trafficking. The miniseries falls short of providing a comprehensive and accurate picture of global human trafficking, and, in some instances, misleads the American public by: (1) ignoring the fact that the largest number of victims trafficked into the U.S. are from Asia; (2) disregarding the work of Asian women-led NGOs; and (3) sensationalizing sex trafficking over other forms of human trafficking.

We express deep concern with the dominant portrayal of Caucasian women as victims in the miniseries. The miniseries focuses exclusively on Eastern European women and a U.S. Caucasian girl as victims of trafficking, and places them in lead roles. The miniseries completely neglects a sizeable group of victims, most notably Asian women. It is not clear why Lifetime chose to highlight only one segment of the global population impacted by human trafficking, even when part of the miniseries takes place in the Philippines. There are thousands of Asian women trafficked in and out of the region and into the U.S., yet Lifetime failed to highlight their stories and struggles. We dare to guess why Lifetime deliberately chose not to cast Asian, APA women or women of color in these roles, nor highlight the impact of trafficking

on these women, given that Asian women comprise the majority of victims trafficked into the U.S.

In addition, the miniseries involves the portrayal of a Caucasian advocate in the Philippines rather than highlighting the work of Asian women in the region. This portrayal omits the obvious fact that in the Philippines there are many nonprofit advocacy groups lead by Asian women. In fact, Filipino women-led organizations, along with many other Asian and women of color organizations, have been actively fighting to end human trafficking for decades both in the U.S. and Asia. By failing to highlight the work of these organizations, Lifetime diminishes their accomplishments and marginalizes their efforts. Moreover, the miniseries perpetuates the notion that “white women” are saviors, a notion against which women of color and foreign women in the women’s movement have struggled.

Finally, we are concerned that focusing solely on sex trafficking misrepresents the extent and degree of trafficking worldwide. The miniseries reinforces the perception among the American public and mainstream media that forced prostitution and sexual exploitation are the only forms of trafficking. The over-reliance on sex trafficking disregards the thousands of people trafficked and forced to work in American homes as domestic servants and servants in servile marriages to American men, and garment and farm workers. A recent International Labor Organization cites that globally “less than half of all trafficking victims are part of the sex trade” and the most recent State Department statistics show that the majority of victims trafficked for labor are from Asia. Labor trafficking has direct links to unfair trade and economic policies that impact source countries for trafficking. Focusing solely on sexual exploitation sensationalizes human trafficking and minimizes the impact of labor trafficking on the most disadvantaged members of our society.

In our opinion, the miniseries does a disservice to the advocacy efforts of many organizations around the country lead by courageous women of color and to the lives of Asian women/women of color who are caught in the unfortunate web of human trafficking. We understand that Lifetime conducted interviews with a number of advocacy organizations prior to and during the production of the miniseries. We assume through information gathered in these interviews that Lifetime attempted to give a more accurate portrayal of this issue. Despite these interviews, the miniseries perpetuates the same message many advocates have received from the U.S. government: that combating human trafficking became a top priority for this country only after Eastern European women were found to be victims of trafficking.

We seek a meeting with Lifetime to further discuss our concerns. We hope to work with Lifetime and be a valuable resource for future endeavors Lifetime undertakes around human trafficking advocacy/public awareness. In addition, we have fact sheets and a statement of principles of how we conduct our advocacy work in human trafficking on our website at [www.napawf.org](http://www.napawf.org). My staff and I will be in New York for other meetings on Thursday, December 8 and Friday, December 9, if you are available. We look forward to speaking with you. You can reach us at (202) 293-2688 or by email at [kahuja@napawf.org](mailto:kahuja@napawf.org).

Sincerely,

Kiran Ahuja  
Executive Director