

Sex slavery everywhere, writer warns

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Canberra's unique human rights laws need to be properly enforced if women are to be protected from forced prostitution, a leading authority on human trafficking says. Melbourne author Kathleen Maltzahn, in Canberra last night to launch her new book on human trafficking, said forced prostitution was not limited to any one culture and could happen anywhere. While she has no particular statistics about whether women are being forced into sex work in Canberra, she said that in her experience "when you look, you find them".

"It's about entrenched disadvantage and the fact that some men are willing to buy women for sex regardless of whether or not they consent," she said. "I think it's about a culture that gives men that benefit." She said the ACT, with its own Human Rights Act, was in a good position to translate words into action when it came to women forced into prostitution, as the Act specifically stated "no one may be held in slavery or servitude". Maltzahn has written to Chief Minister Jon Stanhope, asking him to consider making it mandatory for all regulated brothels in the ACT to display prominent signs in different languages about sexual slavery. Such signs should explain that human trafficking is a serious crime with penalties of up to 25 years, and that "contracts" between sex workers and brothels can be a form of enslavement, as well as provide information on where to get help.

"[Trafficking victims] are either told they have no recourse to the law, that they'll simply be deported, that the traffickers are entitled to do what they're doing," she said. "And even if women do think it must be wrong, it doesn't mean they know how to find help." Maltzahn is also the founding director of Project Respect, a non-government organisation working to oppose violence against women in the sex industry.

Her book, *Trafficked*, claims to be the first book-length account of the trafficking of women and girls for prostitution in Australia. It focuses on the 2003 coronial inquiry into the death of Villawood Detention Centre detainee Puongtong Simaplee, which put the issue of trafficking for prostitution in Australia on the national agenda for the first time. The ensuing stories of other female victims are drawn from her experiences as an outreach worker in Melbourne for women who have been victims of sex slavery and human trafficking. It also looks at the high-profile case of Melbourne brothel owner Wei Tang, who "bought" Thai prostitutes and forced them to work, and whose convictions for possessing and using slaves were reinstated in the High Court last month.