

**Statement of Ms. Hui Danh
Sister of a Vietnamese Victim Sold to a Brothel in Russia**

Before

**The House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights,
and International Organizations**

**Highlighting Vietnamese Government Human Rights Violations
in Advance of the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue**

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I am appreciative for the opportunity to be here today. And thank you for listening to my presentation about my sister's tragic story.

Before presenting my sister's tragedy, I would like to extend my gratitude to Congressman Al Green who met with me in person, to the US State Department, BPSOS, Coalition to Abolish Modern-day Slavery in Asia (CAMSA), and especially the BPSOS President, Dr. Nguyen Dinh Thang. I thank many others whose zealous advocacy helped my sister to safely return to my parents in Vietnam. I came here today to speak on my sister's behalf and especially for the remaining 8 female victims who cannot escape from the same brothel in Moscow where my sister was imprisoned.

My sister, Huynh Thi Be Huong, was victimized by a sex-trafficking ring. Be Huong's tragedy began in 2011. She was approached by an acquaintance with the opportunity to travel to Moscow for employment as a waitress at a night club. Wanting to help her parents, Be Huong hastily assented. The acquaintance referred Be Huong to a job agency that handled her work visa to Russia. The agency did not require Be Huong to pay any up-front fees. She was told that she would pay the agency back whenever she started working.

Unknown to Be Huong, the acquaintance and job agency were agents of a sex-trafficking ring that sells Vietnamese girls to brothels in Moscow. In December 2011, members of the sex trafficking ring escorted her by bus from her home town, Go Quao, in southern Vietnam's Kien Giang province, to Bangkok, Thailand. And, they flew her from Thailand to Moscow.

Our family lost contact with Be Huong for a few months. When Be Huong called home for the first time, she stated that she was fine. In the following phone call, Be Huong requested her parents to send her money. Be Huong told my parents that she was sick and needed the money to pay for her medical expenses. After hearing her story, my parents sold their valuable belongings and sent my sister \$300 dollars.

A few weeks later, Be Huong called my parents again. She told my parents that the restaurant was slow. Be Huong's employer therefore agreed to let her return to Viet Nam. However, Be Huong would need US \$2,000 to pay for her airplane ticket and traveling expenses. My family is poor, so I borrowed the sum from my uncle in the US. We paid Be Huong's employer, a Vietnamese woman in her 40's named Nguyen Thuy An. Yet, Be Huong was not released. Her employer raised the sum to US \$4,000 and then \$6,000.

My parents requested to speak to Be Huong's employer. When being confronted why Be Huong had no money after working there for several months, Thuy An got angry. Realizing her extortion trickery was not working, Thuy An angrily told my parents that Be Huong worked as a prostitute in Moscow serving mostly Vietnamese clients.

Only much later did I learn that, once in Moscow, Be Huong's passport was confiscated and she was immediately taken to a brothel owned by Nguyen Thuy An. My sister was forced into sex slavery on the same day. This lasted for over a year, until her repatriation last month.

Be Huong, 27 years old, recalled the abuses she suffered at the brothel house. The house has three rooms. When she was there, there were 14 other Vietnamese female sex slaves, and one of them was only 16 years old. Another victim had been held captive at the brothel for over four years. New arriving girls were not allowed to leave the house. Be Huong remembered the brothel had two security guards. The guards acted as corporal punishers for those who tried to escape or refuse to serve clients. Two victims who attempted escape were savagely beaten and forced to destroy their own passports so that they would never be able to leave Russia.

Regardless of the time, Be Huong would continuously sell her body as long as she had clients. Clients were able to choose whether they wanted to stay in the brothel for her service or whether they wanted to go elsewhere. If a client chose to stay, Be Huong would lay out a mat to have sex with the client. On any given day, Be Huong was forced to have sex with as many as four clients.

Unless Be Huong was sick, Madam Thuy An forced Be Huong to serve clients. Thuy An would keep all the money and tally up the number of Be Huong's customers. At the end of the month, Thuy An would keep half of the proceeds from Be Huong's customers. That's only in theory. In reality Thuy An made up reasons to deduct "points" from Be Huong's earning. Consequently Be Huong rarely earned any money. There were months where her earning was negative, adding to the large debt that Thuy An had already imposed on her – thousands of US dollars that Thuy An claimed that Be Huong owed her for bringing Be Huong to Russia.

Even though they were held captive against their will, all the victims must pay their captor for rent and food. Every day, the same two meals were served at the brothel: bowl of rice, cabbage, and a portion of cooked pork.

Be Huong stated that she was a sex slave in the brothel for 14 months. She had no money to send back to her parents, but continued against her will to sell her body.

In February of this year, 13 months after her enslavement, Be Huong escaped from the brothel with three other victims – Le Thi Thu Linh, Le Thi Ngan Giang (the victim held captive for over four years at the brothel), and Nguyen Pham Thai Ha (the 16-year old minor). During her escape, Be Huong contacted my parents in Vietnam. With the request from Be Huong, my mother reported Be Huong's story to the local Vietnamese police.

The Vietnamese police gave Be Huong the contact number of the Vietnamese embassy in Moscow. She called the embassy and talked to Nguyen Dong Trieu, a consular envoy in charge of security matters at the embassy. However, Trieu told her that prostitution was not illegal in Russia. He then concluded: "Whoever brought you here, ask them to take you home."

Two days after begging Trieu for help, Be Huong and the other three victims were recaptured by Thuy An and the brothel's guards. Their hiding location was compromised after talking to Trieu. Be Huong later learned that Consular Envoy Trieu was a good friend of Madam Thuy An. In fact, Thuy An's boyfriend's older brother, himself an employee at the embassy, is married to Trieu's niece.

After being hauled back to the brothel, the other three victims received a swollen face as corporal punishment. Be Huong was not beaten because she had been in touch with embassy officials. And her physical appearance might be a concern for Madam Thuy An, who was already planning to send Be Huong to the Vietnamese embassy to recant her denunciation of Thuy An.

Thuy An forced Be Huong to call my family in Vietnam and insist that they withdraw their complaint to the police, call me in Houston and ask that I apologize to Thuy An in writing, and write a self-report admitting that she had wrongly accused Thuy An of sex trafficking. Thuy An then arranged for Be Huong to go to the Vietnamese embassy and submit that self-report to Consular Envoy Trieu.

When I heard my sister's failed escape, I reached out to the U.S.-based anti-trafficking in persons organization named Coalition to Abolish Modern-Day Slavery in Asia (CAMSA), which was co-founded by Boat People SOS. Her tragic story received coverage from Vietnamese media based in the U.S. and then the Houston Chronicle and Radio Free Asia interviewed me.

Madam Thuy An reluctantly agreed to release Be Huong. Be Huong was brought to the Viet Nam Embassy in Moscow to be released.

At the embassy, a staff member named Kien told her that her release was conditional: Be Huong must write a letter stating what she had told her relatives about Madam Thuy An was inaccurate. In addition, Be Huong must thank the embassy officials and Madam Thuy An for having helped her with repatriation. Indeed, Be Huong had to borrow money to buy her own plane ticket home. Neither the embassy nor Thuy An gave her a cent.

Once Be Huong finished writing the thank-you letter, she was put on a plane. She reunited with her 6-year old son and parents in Vietnam on March 3.

As of this moment, Be Huong is living in hiding, afraid of persecution from Madam Thuy An. She had to change her cell phone number because she was contacted by Madam Thuy An's agents. She tested negative for HIV. However, she suffers from psychological issues from her experiences at the brothel.

Be Huong told me that her wish is to see her trapped friends at the brothel be all released. She wants to share her tragedy with others so that her friends can be freed from sex slavery.

I therefore continued to work with Boat People SOS and CAMSA to set the other victims free. I was interviewed by an ever increasing number of media organizations in the US, in Canada, in Australia... I contacted the families in Vietnam of the other victims to get information and to encourage them to sustain the fight.

Thanks to Boat People SOS and CAMSA's efforts to gather information about the whereabouts of the victims, to the US State Department which passed on that information to the Russian police, and thanks to the widening media coverage, six other victims were gradually released. They all made their way home last month.

From them I have learned that on March 5, the Russian police mounted a raid to rescue the victims – 14 of them at that time. However, two hours before the raid, a phone call from the Vietnamese embassy in Moscow tipped off Madam Thuy An. She immediately moved all victims to another location. The Russian police only found an empty apartment. They confiscated all luggage found in the apartment. Two days later Thuy An moved the victims back to the apartment. Many of them were left with only one piece of clothing on their back. Yet they were still forced to serve sex customers.

I believe that the Vietnamese embassy knows how to contact Madam Thuy An and therefore knows exactly where the remaining 8 victims are being held.

I am asking the US Congress to get the Vietnamese government to provide that information to the Russian police, assist in the rescue of the victims, and bring them all home to their families in Vietnam.

Thank you.