

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Child Sex Tourism Remains the “Dirty Little Secret” of the  
Travel Industry According to Survey by ECPAT-USA**

**Travelers Say They Would Support Companies  
that Adopt Tourism Code of Conduct**

**New York, NY (October 20, 2009)** – A new survey of New York City tourists by ECPAT-USA, a nonprofit organization that advocates for policies to protect sexually exploited children, reveals that most travelers are unaware of the extent of the phenomenon of child sex tourism; in particular, of American citizens traveling abroad to engage in sex with minors. More surprisingly, a majority of travelers were unsure of whether an American citizen could be prosecuted for the crime in the country where the exploitation took place as well as in the U.S. Many also admitted they would not report a suspected incident for a variety of reasons; in some cases, because they assumed it was completely legal. However, when informed of the extent of the problem, more than 75% said they would strongly support travel companies that implement a tourism Code of Conduct to help address the issue and protect children at risk.

The survey was designed to determine the level of travelers’ knowledge and understanding of commercial sexual exploitation of children while traveling – commonly known as child sex tourism – and to gauge their attitudes towards companies that implement responsible tourism policies. ECPAT-USA volunteers took to the streets of New York City with survey forms which tourists were asked to complete. The results were then culled from a total of 355 completed surveys between June and September 2009. The report can be downloaded from the ECPAT-USA website: [Traveler Survey Report 2009](#)

“Child sex tourism remains one of the unspoken ‘dirty little secrets’ within the travel industry; yet, it is a large and very troubling phenomenon worldwide,” said Carol Smolenski, executive director of ECPAT-USA. “Around the world, almost 1,000 companies and partner agencies have signed the ECPAT Code of Conduct, but in the U.S., only four have done so. Most don’t want to bring attention to the issue because they are afraid it will reflect badly on them. Yet, our survey proves that it is time for the U.S. travel industry to take this issue more seriously. As travelers become better educated about the issue, they will clearly seek to patronize responsible companies.”

One of the earliest U.S. companies to sign the Code was Carlson Companies, which operates a variety of brands in travel, cruise, hotel, restaurant and marketing arenas. Its brands, which

include Carlson Wagonlit Travel, TGI Fridays, and Regents Hotels and Resorts, are found in more than 150 countries and employ about 160,000 people system-wide.

“Carlson has long supported the efforts of ECPAT to raise awareness among travelers that sex tourism with children is illegal in every country in the world,” said Marilyn Carlson Nelson, chairman of Carlson. “Today’s traveler is more aware than ever before of the need to travel in ways that preserve the environment and protect the world’s resources – certainly there is no more precious resource than our children.”

ECPAT, UNICEF and UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization) developed the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism. An industry-driven initiative, companies that are asked to sign the Code include tour operators, hotels, travel agents, and other organizations that commit themselves to implement measures to establish an ethical policy regarding commercial sexual exploitation of children. This includes the training of personnel, inserting clauses that would require partners and suppliers to develop similar policies, and offering educational literature to help travelers better understand the problem.

“People often think the problem is found only in other countries, but the truth is that more than 25% of child sex tourists around the world may be U.S. and Canadian citizens,” said Smolenski. “That’s why it is critical that more travel companies in the North America sign the Code of Conduct.”

#### **About ECPAT-USA**

ECPAT-USA is the U.S. member of ECPAT International, a global network of organizations and individuals working together for the elimination of child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes. It seeks to encourage the world community to ensure that children everywhere enjoy their fundamental rights free and secure from all forms of commercial sexual exploitation. For more information, see [www.ecpatusa.org](http://www.ecpatusa.org).

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