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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **January 11, 2012**

#### **NEW VIDEO LAUNCHES ABOUT THE LACK OF ADEQUATE CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING LAWS IN THE U.S.**

**New York--** Arresting children involved in prostitution does not rescue them. That is the clear message of “What I’ve Been Through Is Not Who I Am,” a new documentary released by ECPAT-USA and WITNESS that tells the story of Katrina, a formerly sexually exploited teen who was arrested many times. It was only after she accepted an offer of help from a safe haven that she was able to escape.

“Most states’ laws allow children to be arrested for prostitution. Instead of a jail cell we need to give them a safe place to heal. They are not ‘bad’ children, they are abused children,” says Carol Smolenski, Executive Director of ECPAT-USA, a nonprofit organization that advocates for policies to protect sexually exploited children.

“We believe this film will bring much needed visibility to this issue,” says Kelly Matheson, WITNESS Program Manager for the Americas. “When decision makers hear Katrina’s personal story and understand that we are jailing children who are bought and sold for sex, it would be devastating if they did not change the system.”

Children under 18 years old who are sold in the commercial sex industry should be offered protection and a way out of the life of prostitution. This is the message of the new 21-minute documentary released today by two human rights organizations, ECPAT-USA and WITNESS.

In the documentary, Katrina, tells the story of being lured into the sex industry while still a teen, and the abuse she suffered from a trafficker who keep her in that life. Her compelling and emotional story takes us from Atlanta to New York City to Atlanta again, from desperation to recovery and success. Her story illustrates the failure of the criminal justice system to help these youth.

The documentary brings together a diverse set of experts from juvenile justice, law enforcement, child rights, and service providers to speak about the traumatic effects of commercial sexual exploitation of children. They make the case that arresting children is not the right approach for ensuring their recovery from the trauma of prostitution.

The video was created to educate public policy makers, especially state legislators, about the best way to help children involved in the sex trade and ask them to make changes on behalf of these youth. Legislative reform measures and new approaches, recommended in the film, can shift our collective response from a punitive one to a restorative one.

[To view “What I’ve Been Through is Not Who I Am,” click here.](#)

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

ECPAT-USA, the U.S. arm of ECPAT International, is focused on protecting children trafficked into the U.S., American children trafficked for sexual exploitation, and foreign children exploited by American tourists traveling abroad. ECPAT International is a global network of organizations working together for the elimination of child trafficking, child prostitution and child pornography. The network is comprised of 81 groups in 74 countries around the world. All ECPAT groups are independent grassroots organizations, working to combat child exploitation at the local level. For more information, visit [www.ecpatusa.org](http://www.ecpatusa.org)

#### **About WITNESS**

**WITNESS** is the global pioneer in the use of video to expose human rights abuses. We empower people to transform personal stories of abuse into powerful tools for justice, promoting public engagement and policy change. Founded in 1992, WITNESS has partnered with more than 300 human rights groups in over 80 countries, trained over 3,000 human rights defenders, developed widely-used training materials and tools, and supported the inclusion of video in more than 100 campaigns, increasing their visibility and impact. [www.witness.org](http://www.witness.org)