

Iraq Boys Trapped In Commercial Sex Trade

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IRAQ: Focus On Boys Trapped In Commercial Sex Trade

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BAGHDAD, 8 August (IRIN) – Hassan Feiraz, a 16-year-old boy, has started a desperate new life since being forced into the sex trade in Baghdad, joining a growing number of adolescents soliciting in Iraq under the threat of street gangs or the force of poverty.

"Every day I cry at night," Feiraz said. "I'm a homosexual and was forced to work as a prostitute because one of the people I had sex with took pictures of me in bed and said that, if I didn't work for him, he was going to send the pictures to my family."

"My life is a disaster today. I could be killed by my family to restore their honour," he said, explaining that homosexuality was totally unacceptable in Iraq due to religious beliefs.

Following the conflict in 2003, there has been an increase in the number of commercial sex workers (CSWs) in the country, especially among teenagers, according to local officials.

This increase is attributed to economic pressure faced by families countrywide and the presence of new prostitution rings that have sprung up since the invasion. With society in turmoil and a raft of other serious issues to address, child protection has not been uppermost in the priorities of the transitional government.

The gangs use money or threats to get teenage boys to work for them, officials said.

"Many of us are working under threat, but others are there because they don't know how to survive and found it as an easy way of getting money," Feiraz said. "Someone should help free us from these

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criminals."

AN INCREASING PROBLEM

Saeed Muhammad, a senior official in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, said it was addressing the problem but was under-resourced.

"We have been informed about dozens of cases of male prostitution, and all of them [the boys involved] were threatened," he said. "But we don't have the capacity to deal with them."

Muhammad said a special commission had been set up, with help from the Ministry of Interior, to tackle the rings forcing young men into the sex trade.

According to Muhammad, unofficial information suggests there could be as many as 4,000 male commercial sex workers. There are no statistics on the number of boys caught up in the business countr