



AFRUCA – AFRICANS UNITE AGAINST CHILD ABUSE

PRESS RELEASE

6 FEBRUARY 2008

NEW SCOTLAND YARD CLAIM ON “CLOSED WEST AFRICAN COMMUNITY PREVENTING FIGHT AGAINST CHILD TRAFFICKING”

AFRUCA – Africans Unite Against Child Abuse is disappointed by the comment attributed to an unnamed senior police officer at New Scotland Yard in the Sunday Telegraph news coverage of 27 January 2008 on “Children for Sale: The UK’s New Slave Trade”. The unnamed officer was quoted as saying:

“The West African cases are especially difficult because we are mostly dealing with a closed community....”

This unfortunate statement runs the risk of alienating the approximately 3 million West Africans in London who need to be urgently and positively engaged in the fight against the trafficking of children into the country. It is also a slap in the face of the progressive elements of the West African community who are working without any iota of institutional support to address the problem of trafficking and support to victims.

The fact of the matter is that there has never been any serious effort on the part of any government agency in the UK to actively engage or work with ethnic communities in the fight against child trafficking. In particular, government attempts at preventing child trafficking for domestic servitude and benefit fraud have been non-existent or at best tokenistic. To date, no one has ever been prosecuted for trafficking a child into the country for domestic servitude and/or benefit fraud, yet we know that many child victims of trafficking from Africa are here for these purposes.

Our viewpoint is that the Metropolitan Police’s claim above is an excuse to cover up its failure to protect thousands of child victims from Africa, many of

whom were able to escape from their traffickers and have been unsuccessful in seeking help from the police. It is a very weak attempt by the Metropolitan Police to “pass the buck” by laying the blame at the feet of the community while shirking its roles and responsibilities in engaging, preventing and in investigating genuine cases reported by responsible members of the so called “closed community”.

The West African community is one of the UK’s most vibrant and active ethnic minorities in the UK. In particular, the Nigerian community which has the highest number of any African nationals in the country and which equally produces the highest number of victims of trafficking is probably the most integrated and settled in the country. While it is important to explore the reasons for the rise in child trafficking within this community, employing the blame culture will neither solve the problem nor promote the safeguarding of victims.

Our view is that the Metropolitan Police Service ought to embark on an immediate and intensive education and sensitization campaign in genuine partnership with elements of our community who are equally keen to see an end to this evil trade in children. Equally important is the need for perpetrators to be brought to justice. Unless this happens, employing the blame culture to pathologise a community will remain a glaring indication of a lack of will on the part of the authorities to combat the problem and safeguard victims.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. AFRUCA – Africans Unite Against Child Abuse is the premier charity promoting the welfare and campaigning against the trafficking of African children in the UK. Over the past six years, AFRUCA has conducted a number of initiatives to engage the African community as well as educate others about this phenomenon. In particular:
2. In October 2003, in response to the growing number of Nigerian children trafficked to the UK, AFRUCA held an awareness raising campaign in Nigeria to sensitise people to what it termed the “better life syndrome” and the willingness of parents to give their children to third parties to come abroad for a so called better life.
3. In July 2004, AFRUCA held a major conference: “The Role of the African Community in Combating Child Trafficking”, to educate on the role of the African community in engaging with others to stop the practice. A key policy recommendation was to better engage communities to address demand issue fuelling the trade.
4. In response to the government consultation for a Proposal for an Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, in April 2006, AFRUCA submitted a written report to the Home Office. A key element of our recommendation was the need to engage with the African community to jointly tackle the trade in children.

5. In July 2007, AFRUCA held an international conference on Modern Day Slavery. A key conclusion was the need to address the growing link between the trafficking of children to Europe and the link with Witchcraft Abuse.
6. AFRUCA has recently been funded by the Big Lottery to run child protection awareness training for African parents. The prevention of child trafficking and exploitation is one of the key issues covered by the programme.
7. On 25 February 2008, AFRUCA will hold a community meeting on child trafficking in the African community at the House of Commons. The meeting will bring together key stakeholders in the community to debate the issue and identify ways forward.

For further information, enquiries and interviews, please contact Debbie Ariyo, AFRUCA Director by telephone on 0207 704 2261 or by email at info@afruca.org