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FOR IMMEDIATE USE**

“Devastating.”

Mexican journalist Lydia Cacho

joins the Edinburgh International Book Festival

to expose the sad truth about international sex-trafficking

The Mexican journalist and feminist Lydia Cacho spoke to the Edinburgh International Book Festival today about her latest book *Slavery Inc.*, a devastating account of the world trade in human trafficking. She started her talk with some bewildering statistics, “The UN Agency for Organised Crime reported on the anniversary of the abolition of slavery in America... that organised crime rings have sold three times the amount of slaves than when slavery was legal”. In fact Cacho calculated that slavery was worth an estimated \$400 million a year and was recognised as being a more profitable market by gang and mafia leaders than drugs or gun trades: “One kilo of cocaine, you sell it once.” An ex-human trafficker told Cacho from his prison cell, “a little girl you can sell it hundreds of times.”

Cacho’s story is one of remarkable courage and selflessness; she has “dressed as a prostitute” to infiltrate brothels, been chased by the Cambodian mafia, and even had to flee her own country after receiving vile death threats. After the publication of her book *El poder que protege a la pornografía infantil* (The Demons of Eden: the power that protects child pornography) in 2005, a book which named key players in the child pornography trade, she was also arrested in her home city of Cancún and driven to Puebla on the opposite side of Mexico, a journey which consisted of being “tortured by Mexican Mafia for 20 hours”.

After being held in prison for a year, refusing to denounce the evidence in the book, or give away any of her sources, she was finally released. Six years later the leader of a child pornography ring, exposed in Cacho’s book, was arrested on sex trafficking charges and imprisoned for 120 years.

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THE WORLD, IN WORDS

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But this is of course just one man; Cacho stresses to remind us that human trafficking, in particular sex trafficking, is now a global economy, the suppliers just providing what is being demanded by clients from all over the world. “It’s devastating” Cacho said, to see Westerners in South East Asia just walking past – or going into – brothels where children are clearly being used “and not doing anything about it.” She revealed that “clients are creating new markets”: as policing tightens on clients and traffickers returning to the States from South East Asia, demand in the sex trade grows in the under-observed Mexico. Indeed, in Cacho’s shelter alone (a shelter she set up to help the victims of violence in Mexico), around 30,000 women passed through its high-security doors just this year. But this is just a fraction of the total: “around 300,000 girls and women are sold every year in Mexico.” Cacho stated.

And things aren’t set to look any brighter: “We are going to regret celebrating the rise of China.” Cacho said, “So much of China’s economy has been built upon slave labour... their country has improved because they have exploited people.” She also condemned the American military for their appalling exploitation of sex-trafficked women, referring to the “Green Beret” system the United States military used in Korea and then Vietnam: “a green beret in the window of a brothel meant that there were young, virgin and clean prostitutes available.” She emphasised that even today, “most of the military in the world are investing in these kinds of brothels.”

On a final note however, Cacho praised the work of groups such as Amnesty International and PEN, who help to raise awareness about the stark, brutal and sad reality of human trafficking. Walking out to a standing ovation, Lydia Cacho then joined authors Ruth Padel, Jenni Fagan and Jonathan Meres in a free Amnesty International event at the Edinburgh International Book Festival celebrating the work of Mahmoud Darwish.

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