

Human Trafficking Activist Speaks at Bay Area Church to Urge Ballot Initiative

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Herb Behrstock, president of the Bay Area United Nations Association at podium of the Unification Church, San Leandro.

More than 100 people from all faiths, including six Christian ministers, gathered Saturday, December 17, 2011 at the Bay Area Family Church to hear Women's activist Daphne Phung speak about the "Hope for Ending the Atrocity of Human Trafficking in California." Phung is the founder of California Against Slavery (CAS), a non-profit, non-partisan human rights organization focusing on putting an end to human sex trafficking. This issue was brought to the attention of the Unification Church community a few months ago by Mrs. Pat Defletsen and Mrs. Makiko Watanabe, who helped to hold the event at the monthly Community of Faith Prayer breakfast at the Bay Area location of Lovin' Life Ministries.



Rev. Kevin Thompson and Daphne Phung on Dec. 17, 2011.

As the CARP president this year for the Bay Area Community I wanted to share this issue with the CARP members. Not only does California have the highest rate of human trafficking in the United States, but a hub of this heinous crime is Oakland, a nearby city. When I heard this fact, I was appalled. Working at an inner city pre-school in Oakland, indignation was inflamed in my heart. I want more than anything for my pre-school children to have a bright future — and to know that many of the young girls and boys end up becoming trapped in this vicious crime is intolerable.

The purpose of California Against Slavery, according to its website, is to “defend the freedom of every child, woman and man by empowering the people of California to fulfill our obligation to stop human trafficking.” Phung passionately deplored at the prayer breakfast the exploitation of young women that prevails in our society — in our own neighborhoods. She became involved with this issue after watching MSNBC Dateline's documentary, “Sex Slaves in America.”



Bay Area Church choir performed at the Prayer Breakfast.

Phung reported that she was devastated to learn that trafficked victims who appeal for aid from police and prosecutors suffer injustices through our legal system, too. She argued, for example, that California's laws do not reflect the severity of this crime: Those who enslave young girls in prostitution typically only serve about seven years in prison. Phung urged the passage of stricter laws in California in order for the consequences to fit the level of crime. She said that she could not fathom that slavery could still exist in this form in America, where slavery was abolished 150 years ago and determined to start CAS two years ago in order to educate Californians about this atrocity.

Through her trials and tribulations to find a solution to help the victims of this tragic crime, she has finally been able to find some glimmer of hope, she said. As she explained at the prayer breakfast, she truly believes that God has been guiding her efforts. An increasing number of people have come to realize the urgent problem at hand and are standing up to support CAS, including one generous donor who offered \$1,000,000 to help fund a ballot initiative.

The goal of the California Against Slavery is to pass a ballot initiative in 2012 to enact just and effective state laws to protect victims and prevent and prosecute the crime of human trafficking. Herb Behrstock, President of the Bay Area chapter of the United Nations Association informed us about the shameful fact that America is one of only two developed nations in the world that does not prioritize supporting women's rights. But on the brighter note, he claims that California laws allow for its citizens to take matters into their own hands by petitioning for signatures and changing laws through ballot initiatives. This is what we are trying to accomplish.

It is a call for action. If we really believe in the ideal of "One family Under God," we can no longer stand idle while our own brothers and sisters, our own sons and daughters suffer this fate. As Rev. Kevin Thompson, the pastor of the Bay Area Family Church, stated, "As individuals we are useless, but collectively we are powerful." We as religious members of society need to work together to abolish this modern day slavery.