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Colombia to China Sex Trafficking Bust Illustrates Dynamics of Trade

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Colombia

Human Trafficking

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Colombian sex trafficking network brought victims to China's prostitution market



Colombian authorities have arrested members of a network that trafficked women from Colombia to China, revealing some of the dynamics of the lucrative transnational sex trade that continues virtually unchecked in Asia's most populous country.

Nine alleged leaders of a sex trafficking network were [arrested](#) on August 24 during an operation that spanned four of Colombia's biggest cities: Bogotá, Medellín, Pereira and Cali. One of the network's main leaders was also arrested in Spain based on an Interpol red notice.

The sex trafficking network was uncovered through a two-year joint investigation by Colombia's Attorney General's Office, the Criminal Investigation Department of the Police (Dirección de Investigación Criminal de la Policía – DIJIN) and the country's migration agency.

Fifteen victims of the sex trafficking scheme, who returned to Colombia after escaping their captivity in China, provided Colombian authorities with details about the identities, locations and roles of those who run the transnational criminal network.

According to the investigation, "recruiters" or "kidnappers"

belonging to the sex trafficking network scouted their victims from across Colombia, seeking out young women and promising them well-paying jobs as models or saleswomen in China.

The recruits were then transferred to Colombia's capital city Bogotá where travel agents aligned with the trafficking network provided passports, visas and other documentation necessary to leave the country. Once in China, these women say they were forced into prostitution and told they could not leave until they repaid a debt of \$25,000.

Authorities estimate that more than 150 Colombian women have been trafficked to China by this network.

Colombian authorities are also investigating the network's potential involvement in money laundering and has partnered with Chinese authorities to locate and rescue Colombian sex trafficking victims still in the country, [according to El Tiempo](#).

InSight Crime Analysis

The dismantling of the sex trafficking network extending from Colombia to China illustrates the dynamics of supply and demand that have fueled this illegal industry, and the lack of enforcement in China that allows these networks to operate with relative freedom.

As with most sex trafficking schemes, the women targeted by this network were mainly recruited from disadvantaged areas and lured by false promises of an exotic job. This bait-and-switch model has brought vulnerable women from across South America, Africa and Asia to China for sexual exploitation.

SEE ALSO: [Coverage of Human Trafficking](#)

Rising incomes among Chinese in recent years have spurred increased consumption of many goods and services, both licit and illicit. But the demand for prostitution — which is illegal in China — may have a more specific driver: Experts suggest that the Chinese government's [recently-ended](#) “one-child” policy and a cultural preference for sons has led to a skewed ratio of men to women,

which has increased local demand for prostitution and importation of foreign brides. Sex tourism has also flourished, in part because foreigners caught hiring prostitutes are usually fined and released.

In addition, Chinese authorities have shown little interest in combatting sex trafficking networks. The government has done little to tackle sex trafficking, according to the US State Department, which downgraded China to “tier 3” in its latest [Trafficking in Persons report](#), indicating that the country “does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so.”

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