

**Statement of Senator Maria Cantwell**  
**Foreign Relations Committee**  
**July 13, 2004**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting me to testify before the Committee today. I also want to thank you for working with me to bring recognition to the nexus between human trafficking and problems with international marriage brokers.

I would like to say, quickly, that I had the pleasure of meeting with John Miller, Director of the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, just last week. The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, passed by Congress and signed by the President last December 19, actually raises the specter of Mr. Miller's position to the rank of Ambassador-at-Large, calling for an appointment by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. Having received the appointment, I would also like to say that I hope for a speedy consent to John's nomination.

Human trafficking is the politic way of describing modern-day slavery. Last month the U.S. State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons released a new report estimating that between 800,000 and 900,000 men, women, and children are trafficked across international borders every year. The report estimates that 18,000 and 20,000 people are trafficked into the United States each year.

When we talk about human trafficking and abuse, we need to also be aware of the advent of for-profit international marriage brokers – companies that operate solely to connect men and women of different nations with the intent of getting married.

The use of these marriage broker services has exploded in recent years with the growth of the Internet. Websites such as [www.goodwife.com](http://www.goodwife.com); [www.womenrussia.com](http://www.womenrussia.com); and [www.filipinaladies.com](http://www.filipinaladies.com) tout young women looking for love and marriage. In 1999 the Immigration and Naturalization Service commissioned a study that found more than 200 IMBs operating around the globe, arranging between 4,000 and 6,000 marriages between American men and foreign women every year. Today, experts put the number of international marriage brokers at nearly 500 worldwide. And based on the 1999 statistics, there are between 20,000 and 30,000 women who have entered the U.S. using an international marriage broker in the past five years. While there are a few brokers aimed at American female clients who are seeking male spouses from other countries, the overwhelming majority of people who seek IMB services are men.

Unfortunately, women meeting their husbands through brokers frequently have little opportunity to get to know their prospective spouses or assess their potential for violence. They also have little knowledge of their rights as victims of domestic violence in our country, even if they are not yet citizens or permanent residents. And tragically, it is becoming apparent that there is a growing epidemic of domestic abuse among couples who meet via international marriage brokers. Immigrant and women's advocacy groups across the country report seeing an increase in the number of these wives seeking to

escape a physically abusive husband they met through an IMB. And in several cases, the abuse has progressed to murder.

In my home state of Washington, we know of at least three cases of serious domestic violence including two murders of women who met their husbands through Internet-based International Marriage Brokers.

Susanna Blackwell met her husband, Timothy Blackwell, through an international marriage broker and, in 1994, left her native Philippines to move to Washington to marry him. During their short marriage, Mr. Blackwell physically abused his wife regularly. Within a few months, Susanna decided to leave her husband and started divorce proceedings. The Blackwells had been separated for more than a year when Mr. Blackwell learned Susanna was eight-months pregnant with another man's child. On the last day of the divorce proceedings, Mr. Blackwell shot and killed Susanna, her unborn child, and two friends who were waiting outside of the Seattle courtroom.

In 1999, 18-year-old Anastasia Solovyova married Indle King, a man she met through an international marriage broker. Entries from Anastasia's diary detail the abuse she suffered at the hands of her husband and the fear she had for him. According to Anastasia's diary, Mr. King threatened Anastasia with death if she were to leave him; and, in December 2000, this threat came true.

At trial, it was discovered that Mr. King had been previously married another woman he met through an Internet-based IMB, as well, a woman who instituted a domestic violence protection order against Mr. King prior to divorcing him in 1997. It was also discovered that he was seeking his third wife through another international marriage broker when he developed the plot to kill Anastasia.

Sadly, there are similar examples across the country of women who have met their American spouses through an internet-based marriage broker only to be seriously injured or killed by an American spouse with a preexisting history of violence against women.

In response to these cases, I introduced the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act (S. 1455). This legislation is modeled on a series of groundbreaking Washington state laws related to trafficking of persons and "mail order brides."

The primary goal of my legislation is to better inform women entering this country as a prospective spouse about the past history of the man she may be marrying and to better inform them of their rights as residents of the United States if they become victims of domestic violence.

The bill would, first, halt the current practice of allowing Americans to simultaneously seek visas for multiple fiancées by requiring that only one fiancée visa may be sought per applicant each year. Currently, multiple requests for fiancée visas can be simultaneously filed with the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration, and the American requesting the visa will simply choose to marry the first woman who is approved.

Second, my bill would require that, before an international marriage broker may release the contact information of a foreign national client, the broker must first obtain her consent to the release of that information and provide her with information, in her own language, on the rights of victims of domestic violence in this country.

Third, the international marriage broker would be required to ask American clients to provide information on any previous arrest, conviction or court-ordered restriction relating to crimes of violence along with their previous marital history. This information would also be made available to the foreign national.

Finally, it would require a U.S. citizen seeking a foreign fiancée visa to undergo a criminal background check, a check that is already performed for the fiancées entering the country themselves. Information on convictions and civil orders would be relayed to the visa applicant by the consular official along with information on their legal rights should they find themselves in an abusive relationship.

Today, an American seeking to marry someone through an international marriage broker holds all of the cards. The American client has the benefit of a complete background check on his future wife, which is a requirement of the immigration process. In addition, the brokers provide clients extensive information about the women they offer, everything from their favorite movies and hobbies to whether they are sexually promiscuous.

Conversely, the foreign fiancée only gets whatever information her future spouse wants to share. These women have no way of confirming what they are told about previous marriages or relationships -- or the American client's criminal history.

Most of the foreign brides advertised by the international marriage brokers come from countries where women are oppressed, have few educational or professional opportunities, and where violence against women is condoned, if not encouraged. Because of the cultural differences, researchers say there is an inherent imbalance of power in these relationships between American men and foreign women.

Because these women often immigrate alone, they have no family or other support network and rely on their husbands for everything. Such dependency can make it difficult for a wife to report abuse without worrying that doing so is a surefire ticket to deportation. Researchers agree that isolation and dependency put these women at greater risk of domestic abuse.

Documenting the extent of this problem has been quite difficult. Marriages arranged by brokers are not tracked separately from other immigrant marriages. However, experts agree that abuse is more likely in such an arranged marriages and that abuse in these relationships is likely underreported since the women are likely to be more afraid of deportation than the abuse they suffer at home.

**\*\* DRAFT as Prepared \*\***

My legislation would give foreign fiancées critical information they need to make an informed decision about the person whom they plan to marry. It puts these foreign brides on more equal footing with their American grooms.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity to come before you and address the unique intersection of trafficking of persons and the use of International Marriage Brokers. I look forward to working with all of you so that we might foster the freedom and free will of individuals throughout the world and here at home in the United States.