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The World Cup and prostitution

John L. Allen Jr. | Jun. 11, 2006 All Things Catholic

The biggest sporting event on the planet, the World Cup, is set to open in Germany, and various sectors of the local economy are gearing up to accommodate the millions of fans, athletes and support staffs that will converge on the various sites of competition.

Not to be outdone, the German prostitution industry has announced that it too is expanding operations, opening special "houses of tolerance" in zones of the country where sex-for-hire is legal. On Wednesday, Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, gave an interview to Vatican Radio warning that the World Cup may provide a significant boost to human trafficking in the sex trade.

"To use the language of soccer, I believe some 'red cards' need to be assigned to this industry, to its clients and to the public authorities who host the event," Marchetto said.

"Women become a product for purchase, whose cost is even lower than that for a ticket to one of the games," he said. "Over 40,000 women will enter into the circuit of prostitution during the World Cup, and many of them are forced to engage in this 'activity' against their will."

Marchetto said the church is trying to do what it can to cope with this "boom" for the sex business by assisting women who are the victims of trafficking.

"In Italy alone, there are more than 200 sisters involved in this pastoral field," he said. "Many religious congregations are already active in assisting these persons, seeking new ways to promote their dignity. In Germany, the church organization Solowodi ('Solidarity with Women in Need') is already active, with collaboration among 20 religious congregations."

Marchetto said it's not enough to help women after the fact. It's also important, he said, to challenge the "consumers" in the sex business, and to teach young men a "healthy human sexuality."

Beyond that, Marchetto said, it's up to the German authorities to police the sex business aggressively during the World Cup.

Returning to a soccer metaphor, Marchetto said, "The ball is on their side of the field."

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