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# Airlines' role grows in war on U.S. sex trafficking



By Mickey Goodman

ATLANTA | Thu Oct 7, 2010 11:46pm BST

(Reuters Life!) - Airline passenger Deborah Sigmund noticed something strange about the man and boy who ran up late to catch a US Airways flight last December from Washington to Palm Beach, Florida.

When staff at the gate asked the man for the boy's name, he had to rifle through papers for an answer. On board, Sigmund quietly asked the boy why he was going to Florida.

"I thought I was going to North Carolina," he said.

Sigmund said she alerted the aircrew who radioed ahead to authorities about a possible case of child trafficking. Her quick wits helped her spot what authorities later told her was a likely case of a child abducted for use in pornography.

Her intervention is evidence of a growing effort by grass-roots organizations in the hotel and airline industries to back up the work of governments and international law enforcement in fighting human trafficking.

But Sigmund had a head start. As founder of non-profit Innocents at Risk, she had set up a training program to help airline staff and the hospitality industry spot signs of trafficking.

She has worked with Nancy Rivard of Airline Ambassadors International (AAI), a group that has expanded its traditional humanitarian mission to help beat the trafficking scourge.

"We are in a unique position to play a critical role in teaching airline personnel to identify traffickers and report them," said Rivard, who worked for 30 years for American Airlines and founded the AAI group.

Tell-tale signs to detect possible trafficking are: Does a child have few personal items when they board a plane? Do they avoid eye contact, look paranoid, undernourished or ill-treated, or behave in an unusually submissive manner?

Does the adult with them refuse to let them speak for themselves or roam around the plane freely?

If so, the airline steward could be witnessing a case of child trafficking similar to the one Sigmund saw.

## PIMPS AND CLIENTS

Airlines and hotels play a crucial, if unwitting, role in the global human trafficking industry by providing transport and lodging to criminals.

That industry represents \$32 billion in value to organized crime and is the fastest growing criminal

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-0.19%

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2,926.60

-0.22%

**TR EQUITY UK**

**-0.22**

104.84

-0.21%

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11,020.40

**NIKKEI**

9,388.64

**HANG SENG**

23,121.70

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