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AdvocacyNet  
News Bulletin 105  
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## **WASHINGTON STUDENTS JOIN FORCES WITH PROFESSIONAL WOMEN TO FIGHT AFRICAN TRAFFICKING**

May 4, 2007, Washington DC: Two students from Washington DC will this summer use blogging to help professional women in this nation's capital to understand the grim realities of African trafficking.

The students, Leslie Ibeanusi and Michelle Lanspa have been recruited by the [Advocacy Project \(AP\)](#) to serve as peace fellows with the Transnational AIDS Prevention Among Migrant Prostitutes in Europe Project (TAMPEP), an organization that seeks to halt the trafficking of women to Europe.

Last week, Ms. Ibeanusi and Ms. Lanspa were invited to attend the annual gala of the Zonta Club of Washington, a women's service organization. Members of the Zonta Club have offered to follow the students' work through their blogs, link up with them on their return to Washington and help them to promote TAMPEP's work in the US.

AP has recruited 32 peace fellows to work with partners this summer. All of the fellows are being encouraged to work with community activists from their own towns, and to link up with them on return from assignment.

Zonta International has 33,000 members in 68 countries and has supported projects in over 20 countries, including an effort to curb trafficking in the Balkans. Since 2001, the Washington branch of Zonta has awarded over \$280,000 in scholarships to women attending Washington DC area universities, and undertaken projects to improve the status of women in the Washington area.

Mary Ellen Bittner, chairman of the Zonta Club's Advocacy Task Force and the immediate past president of Zonta International, said that supporting the two AP peace fellows would be consistent with the Club's commitment to young women and its desire to engage in challenging issues.

"We hope that Michelle and Leslie will help us to better understand trafficking, and what we can do to prevent it," said Mrs. Bittner. "We also want to support these courageous and enthusiastic young women in their crucial work."

Trafficking reaches deep into the villages of Nigeria and preys on the superstition and poverty of Nigerian girls to lure them into the sex trade, which can be extremely violent as well as abusive. Tens of thousands of Nigerians have been trafficked to Italy.

Hundreds are rounded up by the Italian police each year and forcibly returned to Nigeria, where they are often treated as outcasts.

In Turin, TAMPEP sends mobile teams out onto the streets to offer medical, social and legal support to Nigerian prostitutes. This spring, TAMPEP also opened an office in Nigeria, to spread the word about the risks from trafficking.

The two AP fellows described themselves as excited at the opportunity. “This is a chance for me, as a Nigerian woman, to give back to other young girls back home, and most importantly, to serve as their voice.” said Ms. Ibeanusi, an American national whose family is from Nigeria. “Trafficking and sex slavery must stop.”

Ms. Ibeanusi is studying for a Masters in public health at George Washington University. She was elected Miss Nigeria-USA in 2004 and has been using her status as a celebrity to advocate for women’s health in the US and Nigeria.

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**For more information:**

Visit Zonta Club of Washington, DC’s website <http://www.zontawashingtondc.org/who-we-are.html>

The Advocacy Project’s website <http://advocacynet.org/>. Phone 202 758 3328.