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*'Missing Girls' in Asia: Magnitudes, Implications, and Possible Responses*  
American Enterprise Institute  
(1150 17<sup>th</sup> St., 12th Floor Conference Room)  
Wednesday, September 17, 2:00–4:00 p.m.

Good afternoon.

I want to begin by thanking my good friend and former colleague, Nick Eberstadt, and AEI for hosting this important symposium. I also want to thank Laura for her overview of the scope and magnitude of this problem, and I look forward to hearing from Monica Gupta on the possible responses to effectively address this issue.

Some may be wondering why the point person for the U.S. government's efforts to fight human trafficking is speaking at an event on the gender gap in some Asian countries.

Since 2001, our annual Trafficking in Persons Report has noted the disturbing trend of this gender imbalance as exacerbating the demand for trafficking victims, particularly for women and girls as brides and for commercial sex.

Forced brides are considered victims of trafficking when these women are kidnapped, sold unwillingly by family members, or deceived by promises of lucrative jobs. Even in situations where a woman crosses a border voluntarily, and initially consents to a marriage, she is a victim of trafficking if she later withdraws her consent and is held against her will.

According to the U.S. intelligence community, of the estimated 800,000 people trafficked across international borders annually, 80 percent of victims are female, and up to 50 percent are minors. The majority of transnational victims are women and girls trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation. Women and young girls are often trafficked into brothels, physically and sexually abused as domestic servants, or forced into marriages.

Human trafficking is a dehumanizing crime which treats people as mere commodities. As such, it includes both supply and demand-side factors. On the supply side, criminal networks, corruption, lack of education, and

poverty make people vulnerable to the lures of trafficking. Significant efforts are being made to address these "push" factors.

At the same time, the demand side of the equation is powerful. A major consequence of the widening gender gap is the increased demand for forced marriages and prostitution.

That fact that several million more men than women are in the marriage market in countries with a gender gap issue has created a "marriage squeeze" and pressure for men to find women to marry. Current imbalances in the sex ratio often leave low-income men spouseless in mostly rural communities where it is an economical and cultural imperative that they marry.

The social pressure and economic necessity to marry causes some who cannot find marriageable women to buy brides from other regions within the country, or from neighboring countries. The need to buy kidnapped brides because of the shortage of marriageable females opens another outlet for human traffickers to make a profit on women imported from elsewhere.

A pronounced deficit of brides can be seen in certain areas of India and China. Data from India's 2001 census shows that there were only 933 girls born for every 1,000 boys, due largely to the perception that a girl child is an economic liability in that country's strong patriarchal society and due also to dowry demands by potential grooms. Internally in India, sources report a pattern of girls trafficked from Bihar, West Bengal and Assam to the more prosperous states of Punjab and Haryana, which have the most acute gender gaps. Additionally, there are some cases in which women from Nepal, Bangladesh, and other areas of India have been bought or kidnapped as brides for so-called "bachelor villages." The lack of women contributes to greater demand for prostituted women and girls, again, fueling the demand for victims of trafficking.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) continues to enforce its one-child policy in which most couples are limited to having only one child. Combined with a traditional son-preference and the availability of sex-selection technology, China faces a generation characterized by gender imbalance.

In the PRC, trafficked women either sold by family members or kidnapped from their villages, are forced into marriage, prostitution or to serve as mistresses. The trade of women and girls for sexual exploitation is a clear trafficking challenge for the Chinese government. Although prostitution is illegal, the burgeoning illicit sex industry creates vulnerability to sex trafficking within and across China's borders.

Forced brides are commonly trafficked domestically from poor areas of China's inland provinces, where poverty renders women more vulnerable to trafficking. Traffickers generally sell these girls and women in provinces with large female deficits.

Neighboring countries such as Burma, Vietnam, North Korea, and Russia are also source countries for women trafficked into China. In some instances, vulnerable women from North Korea and Vietnam are kidnapped or tricked by traffickers, and subsequently sold into marriage, sometimes for as little as \$250 to \$800. The buyers are typically poor Chinese farmers. North Korean women are particularly vulnerable given their disincentive to return to the repressive DPRK.

Let me offer just one woman's story—an example noted in this year's TIP Report.

Nineteen-year-old SoYoung stands at less than five feet tall after being chronically malnourished in North Korea.

A refugee, she crossed illegally into China with hopes of a better life, but found instead a nightmare of sexual exploitation. An "employer" offered her approximately \$1.40 per day in exchange for work—money that So-Young planned on sending back to her family. Alone in a foreign country and unable to speak the language, she was an easy target for traffickers.

Deceived by an empty promise, SoYoung spent the next several months being passed between handlers who hoped to sell her as a bride. Once she was sold, her new "husband" raped her multiple times before she was able to escape.

SoYoung's situation is not unique. The phenomenon of North Korean women trafficked into and within China for forced marriage is well-documented by NGOs and international organizations.

The core principle of any effective anti-trafficking strategy is the protection of victims. Trafficked brides face many challenges in receiving the protection and services they need.

They are often discouraged from reporting their situations or running away because of social and economic pressure to remain in a marriage; lack of familiarity with the area to which they were trafficked; police or official complicity that compels the return of runaway brides; laws which re-victimize trafficked women by classifying and prosecuting them as illegal aliens; and the social ostracizing and discrimination they would likely face if they return home.

Ending this form of modern-day slavery involves a multi-faceted strategy.

We continue to engage governments, urging them to:

- 1) Prosecute traffickers and those who would exploit vulnerable women and girls for forced marriage and commercial sex;
- 2) Protect the victims who shouldn't be treated as criminals or disposable people, but should be protected from further trauma; and
- 3) Prevent the trafficking of victims by raising public awareness, training law enforcement to recognize signs of trafficking, and reconsidering policies that may fuel the trade in people.

Thank you today for the opportunity to shed some light on the disturbing trend of “missing girls” – which helps perpetuate trafficking due to the scarcity in females– and its adverse impact on the global fight against trafficking in persons. As concerned actors from the international community, government, and civil society, I thank you for being here. You are welcome partners in the truly global coalition for the abolition of modern-day slavery.