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Alejandra Gil, the “Madam of Sullivan”: defender of the rights of sex workers by day and sexual exploiter by night

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By Paula Escalada Medrano

Mexico, 22 Feb. (EFE).- By day, Alejandra Gil met with politicians and took pride in defending the rights of sex workers but, by night, she changed costumes and brought out her real identity as an exploiter of prostitutes, a cruel “madam” arrested by Mexican police.

Last week, the prosecutor's office of the Federal District arrested two “potential human traffickers”: Alejandra Gil and Omar Sayún Gil, mother and son, who allegedly led prostitution on Sullivan street in the Mexican capital.

The arrest took place after the rescue of several victims, calculated to number two hundred.

Thus far, this could be frequent news: the arrest of a “madam”, the leader of one of the most important prostitution areas in the Mexican capital, a street measuring 1,300 metres, distributed among “pimps” and charging protection fees to prostitutes.

But this woman was not just another “madam”, as she publicly held the presidency of Asociación Civil Pro Apoyo a Servidores (Aproase) (Civil Association for the Support of Servers) and participated in many legislative forums to speak for the rights of people engaging in prostitution.

Madai, a 24-year-old girl, did know the hidden face of this woman who claimed to have been a sex worker, even though nobody ever saw her on the streets, while dozens of girls under her charge serviced customers, even if they were pregnant or had been beaten up.

“Her job was to watch us from the car. Her son or her took us to hotels and charged us fees. She kept records. She had a list where she kept records of everything. She even wrote down how long you took”, she told Efe.

As is the case for many other young women, Madai's “owner” kidnapped her with promises of love, after meeting him in Veracruz when she was 19-years old.

“He wooed me, made me fall in love, and I believed everything he told me. That I would go live with him, that he was going to marry me... He was the one who took me to Alejandra Gil and her son”, she said.

He took her to the capital and that is where her nightmare began: two years of enslavement, threatening to kill her and her family.

“He always told me that he would bury me and then go after my family [...] I was very afraid and I saw no way out. This is an organised crime network where everybody knows each other. They all know. It is complicated to escape because many girls are killed while trying to escape”.

All the money she earned from the dozens of men she slept with went to her “pimp” and a fee of 250 pesos to Alejandra, who even sold her condoms, even though these were “free from the health department”.

She spent two years that way until, in 2012, she managed to escape when she was told they were transferring her to the United States and gathered the courage to flee.

She managed to get her “pimp” in jail and gave one of the first statements that the prosecutor's office used to arrest Alejandra Gil.

“Alejandra presented herself several times as an activist and a defender. I believed her because she provided information about other madams. She fooled everyone”, said Rosi Orozco, president of the Commission United Against Trafficking, to Efe.

As an activist, Orozco has been quite close to this case, listening to many of the victims and even helping them personally to get out of their “periods of enslavement”.

“In Mexico, we cannot continue to tolerate people exploiting others' prostitution in any manner whatsoever. If a worker wants to sell her body, she has every right and is free to do so but someone else should not benefit from her exploitation”, she said.

People like Alejandra “abuse the vulnerability and live off of people who are being exploited sexually” and they themselves end up becoming exploiters.

Beyond the lies of Alejandra Gil, what outrages Orozco the most is that politicians believed her and even made regulations based on her opinions, instead of listening to the victims.

“Those who survived are the ones who are bringing the shadows to light. Nobody should silence those voices, as [...] it is the only way to stop this”, she added.

Since she freed herself, Madai has dedicated herself to speaking up and standing up for others who are suffering the same fate, so they too feel they can escape.

“There are so many people who want to silence us. I want it to be very clear to her that we will not be silenced, we will keep talking”, said the girl, who, thanks to a foundation, has managed to turn her life around and begin studying law.

She is in her fourth semester. “Listening to each of these girls' cases led me to studying law. I know that I can also help them with this and I can (also) understand them due to what I experienced”.

These girls “are vulnerable and do not know their rights”, sometimes they do not even consider themselves victims, said the girl, who says that she is not against prostitution but against exploitation even though these two concepts are “very much related to each other”. EFE

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