

Fighting Sex Trafficking One Tweet at a Time

✖ A Florida journalist plans to fight sex trafficking one “tweet” at a time by using the social networking site Twitter to mobilize 9,000 people to give \$9 on Sept. 9.

Diana Scimone, founder of Born to Fly International, a nonprofit child advocacy organization, hopes to raise \$81,000 tomorrow to begin printing *Born to Fly*, a children’s book she wrote to raise awareness among children and parents about the sex trafficking industry.

Photo: Diana Scimone during a visit to Asia

“Each year more than a million children are lured into slavery around the world,” Scimone said. “Imagine what a dent we can make in the trafficking pipeline if we educate kids and their parents about the tactics traffickers use before they show up at their doorstep.”

Scimone says the \$9.5 billion sex trade industry, which she says has reached “pandemic” proportions both inside and outside the U.S., is built on unsuspecting children whom traffickers entice with promises of “employment.”

Scimone said she has personally witnessed the power of “twitterthons” to bring awareness to important causes.

“I’m very active on Twitter, and I’ve donated to a number of other twitterthons and watched what works and what doesn’t,” said Scimone, who is known on Twitter as @dianascimone. “There’s such an awareness to stop child trafficking right now, and that has helped tremendously. I’m blown away by how many people on Twitter that have gotten behind what we’re doing.”

Participants are being asked to not only give \$9 but to utilize the entire social networking universe to spread the word about the campaign by adding @09_09_09 to their tweets, e-mailing nine of their friends, and blogging and posting information about it on Facebook.

All contributors will be entered to win donated prizes, which have been announced via Scimone's blog. The gifts include two free nights at a Hawaiian resort and hand-crafted jewelry.

Having visited numerous countries as a veteran journalist, Scimone said she was stirred to advocacy after visiting places such as Thailand and Mumbai, India, where she saw little girls who had been raped and tortured.

"As a journalist I've seen a lot," Scimone said. "I've been to a refugee camp in Sudan, an orphanage overflowing with 'throwaway' kids in China, and a home for AIDS orphans in Zimbabwe. Nothing, however, prepared me for what I saw in Mumbai, India: cages that held little girls—some as young as 5 years old—smuggled in from Nepal."

"Traffickers think kids are commodities," Scimone added. "On 9/9/09, I challenge my Twitter followers to tell kids they're priceless."