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Answering The Cries Of Burma's Children

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When Ambassador Power spoke last month at the [Moms +SocialGood summit](#) about the current crises facing children around the world -- particularly in those nations ranked the [worst countries in the world to be a mother](#) today -- I was inspired to reflect upon my own experience working with orphaned children in a country ranked much higher on the list than our own.

I volunteered in spring 2010 with a small group of students in Sangklaburi, a small village in Thailand nestled near the Burmese border, at the Baan Unrak Children's Village. Baan Unrak, or "House of Joy," is home to around 140 orphaned children ranging from infants up to 18-year-olds. Because most Sangklaburi residents reside in small homes often without plumbing and in what I thought were poor conditions, I did not question why there were so many orphans living in this small town. I was surprised to learn that these were not in fact Thai orphans but [abandoned Burmese and ethnic minority children](#).

The economic state and legacy of military rule in Burma created conditions so oppressive that (as the orphanage caretakers told me) some Burmese would families leave their infants on the Thai border with the sole hope that they would be saved by a Thai mother. It's unimaginable to me that leaving an infant alone and letting destiny take its course is a better outcome than living [an oppressed life in Burma](#), but that is the reality and choice many mothers are forced to make. Even if these abandoned children live to make it across the border, their story doesn't end there. Without papers or official transcripts, these children are not legally allowed to go to Thai school and are therefore left with scarce options -- one of which is being coerced into making a living in the Thai sex trade.

If you have ever visited Thailand or know someone who has, you have probably heard of the infamous ping pong and bar shows. What most tourists do not know is that by attending and paying for these shows, you are in some way supporting the human trafficking and exploitation of children. These could be the orphans, abandoned on the country's border, left with no papers and no way out -- and it often amazes me when I listen to friends who have paid for these shows, who have no idea what they really just supported.

The shining light in this story is [Baan Unrak](#), which is home to these orphans and provides free education supported by the generosity of donors and by self-sustaining maintenance practices. As Elizabeth Smart said in her closing interview at the Moms +SocialGood event, human trafficking is a global issue that is taking place not only within the most war-ravished nations, but in popular vacation destinations around the world like Thailand, and right here in our own backyards. What you can do to help is raise awareness for this issue and support programs to improve the lives of women and children around the world.

Visit the [Global Moms Challenge](#) page and get involved today.

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