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Child kidnap survivors Elizabeth Smart and Rani Hong to headline Jan. 10 child trafficking awareness event in Lacey

Parents of missing children Lindsey Baum and Kyron Horman will also be on hand to promote prevention and Amber Alert program awareness

Lacey, WA – As a young teenager, Elizabeth Smart was kidnapped in the early hours of the morning from her bedroom in her family's home in Salt Lake City, Utah and held in captivity for nine months.

Rani Hong, a bright-eyed, seven-year-old girl was taken from her village in India and sold by a broker into child slavery, and eventually trafficked through Canada into Washington state.

Today, Hong and Smart are free, and determined to help other children avoid the devastating scars of child kidnapping and exploitation here in Washington state and around the world.

A Jan. 10 event "Hidden in Plain Sight: Protecting Our Children" will focus attention on the trafficking issue and culminate with an evening keynote featuring adult survivors, Hong and Smart. The event has been organized by Rotary Clubs of Thurston County.

More than 20 community organizations and law enforcement agencies will be on hand from 1:00–6:00 p.m. at a free community fair, sponsored by Zonta's Club of South Puget Sound. It will be held at the Marcus Pavilion at Saint Martin's University in Lacey. Services and tools to protect children from child exploitation, including fingerprinting, retina scans, and Crime Stoppers "My Child ID" kits for children will be available. The 7:00 p.m. keynote will also be held at the Marcus Pavilion.

Admission to the afternoon community fair is free. The evening keynote admission is \$15 for senior citizens and students and \$20 for adults. Proceeds will benefit local prevention programs and The Tronie Foundation, a non-profit organization based in Olympia, WA.

The event coincides with National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month in January.

"Washington State is again leading our country in the fight against human trafficking," said Hong. "And we want to help ensure the state's message gains the attention it deserves so others will follow our lead."

"Many missing and runaway children are picked up by traffickers within 48 hours of their captivity," she said. "Every 15 seconds, a child is sold into slavery. As a kidnapped survivor, I applaud Washington State Patrol and other key leaders for their work in the development of the first web portal in the United States. As an advisor to United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT), I encourage world-wide policy changes in support of protecting all children from being kidnapped and sold like products."

The Washington State Patrol serves as the state's Amber Alert program manager and is responsible for the alerting web portal (amberalert.com) and the training of local law enforcement on issuing alerts. Carri Gordon, manager of Washington State Patrol Missing and Unidentified Persons Unit, noted that issuing Amber Alerts with as much information on the victim and suspect as possible, as quickly as possible, can make a significant difference in recovering a child safely. Washington state was one of the first in the U.S to issue Amber Alerts in 2005.

Integral to a successful Amber Alert system is the support and partnership of the state's TV and radio broadcasters. "Washington's local radio and television stations are proud to have helped establish Washington's Amber Alert System, its use of the Washington Emergency Alert System, and to be the 'first informers' to help law enforcement and the public locate and return abducted children swiftly to safety," said Mark Allan, Esq, president and CEO of the Washington State Association of Broadcasters. "Washington's broadcasters salute the Tronie Foundation for its work and urge everyone to observe Amber Alert Awareness Day this coming Sunday, January 13th."

The abduction of Elizabeth Smart was one of the most followed child abduction cases of our time; her captors had controlled her by threatening to kill her and her family if she tried to escape. Fortunately, the police safely returned Elizabeth to her family on March 12, 2003 after being held prisoner for nine months. "If the unthinkable happens to your family, do not ever lose hope, miracles do happen," said Smart.

Rani Hong is a kidnapped child trafficking survivor-turned-advocate, now working to spark an international movement against modern-day slavery. As a child living in India, Hong was kidnapped from her family and sold into slavery at the age of seven by a woman who promised her parents that she would receive an education. Documents indicate that this trusted family friend instead sold her to a child broker in a neighboring state. Witnesses say the broker was involved in child labor trafficking and was forcing children to make bricks in factories.

After a year in captivity, Hong was deemed destitute and dying. Records show that she was illegally sold to an international adoption agency through Canada, and then into Washington state. A single mother in Olympia who believed she was working with a legitimate organization in India ultimately adopted her.

"This is why I'm telling my story today," said Hong, "There are millions of other individuals, like that little girl I was — imprisoned, enslaved, and silenced — unable to tell their stories. I speak for those without a voice."

To learn more about the Tronie Foundation, visit: www.troniefoundation.org

A media availability is scheduled for 6:15 – 6:45 p.m. in the Saint Martin's University Worthington Center, Cheney Room (5300 Pacific Avenue SE, Lacey, WA). Participants will include:

- Dave Kirk, moderator, lead developer of the Amber Alert web portal
- Elizabeth Smart, abduction survivor and founder of the Elizabeth Smart Foundation
- Rani Hong, child survivor, UN Special Advisor and president of The Tronie Foundation
- Melissa Baum, mother of missing child, Lindsey Baum
- Kaine Horman, father of missing child, Kyron Horman
- Carri Gordon, manager of Washington State Patrol Missing and Unidentified Persons Unit and the Amber Alert program coordinator, WSP