



P.O. Box 2117, St. John's, Antigua

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### ***IWC SUPPORTS FAWCO'S FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN BY COLLECTING BRAS FOR FREE THE GIRLS PROGRAM!***

St. John's, Antigua (**8 December 2014**) - The International Women's Club of Antigua and Barbuda has thrown their support behind FAWCO's Target Project "Free the Girls" and their new international campaign "Donate a Bra". FAWCO (The Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas), announced "Free the Girls" as one of their Target Projects at the March 2014 Interim Conference in Brussels. "Free the Girls" works with former victims of sex trafficking in Africa and Latin America, helping them rebuild their lives through economic empowerment.

"Free the Girls" is a non-profit organization that provides job opportunities for survivors of sex trafficking. By collecting gently-used bras, "Free the Girls" donate them to women starting inventory for their own business selling the bras. Women "Free the Girls" work with were sold into prostitution, often as children. Bras provide great income, working in a safe environment with a flexible schedule, is a sustainable model, and has minimal effects on local markets.

Why bras? Bras provide a great income because second-hand clothing is a thriving industry in many countries around the world. Bras are usually sought-after items and some girls in the program are making three-to-five times the minimum wage in their communities selling bras!

For instance, Ofelia who sells second-hand bras that she buys from "Free the Girls" says that growing up her family did not have much, sometimes her mother worked but lost her job. Ofelia would go to look for water, cabbage and other things to cook. One day, a man came to offer help to her and her family. He offered a better place for her and her sister to live. He told her mother that he had food. They didn't know that he had some other plans.



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Ofelia was eventually able to get away and was one of three women who participated in the "Free the Girls" pilot program in Mozambique. Today she is the most successful woman there. She makes about 22,000 MZN a month in a city where the minimum wage is just under 4,000 MZN a month. In terms of US dollars, Ofelia typically makes about \$22 per day in a city where the minimum wage is about \$4 pr day.

Since 2012, her life has changed significantly. She built a house made of bricks with glass windows. She supports herself, her sister, her sister's children, her boyfriend and their baby girl. Of course, her baby girl will never have to face a life on the streets. Ofelia won't have to make the decision to allow her child to be taken away by strangers rather than watch her starve to death. "Free the Girls" has changed the trajectory of Ofelia's entire family.

Bras provide an opportunity for these women to work with other women since they have a history of being abused and used by men. Most of the women "Free the Girls" work with were sold into prostitution as children, only eight to ten years old. Because their lives were stolen from them, they missed out on going to school and getting an education. Selling bras allows them to work as much or as little as their school schedule permits.

Once a program has started with an aftercare provider, it is designed to sustain itself. The women in the program receive their starting inventory as a donation, and are then able to buy additional inventory from "Free the Girls" for below wholesale value to help maintain their competitive edge in the marketplace. Revenue from inventory sales helps subsidize overseas program costs.

There is no doubt that second-hand clothing had an effect on local production of clothing in Africa in the past. However, researchers have shown that the current impact is far less than would be assumed. Let us support this cause by collecting bras here in Antigua. They can be delivered in St. John's at the Street Pastors office on Corn Alley near Redcliffe Street. Or call Paula Callam at 722-7966.

The Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas (FAWCO), Inc. is an international network of independent organizations whose mission is to serve as a resource and channel of information among its members, provide a voice for American women abroad and to support the rights of all Americans worldwide and contribute actively to the global community with a specific focus on education, the natural and human environment, multicultural understanding and international goodwill.



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FAWCO has a combined membership of nearly 18,000 in 37 countries worldwide. FAWCO serves as a support network for members living and working abroad and is particularly active in concerns and issues of overseas Americans, education, environmental awareness, health, human rights and women's and children's rights in particular. The FAWCO Foundation, an independent not-for-profit corporation, oversees the philanthropic efforts and endeavors of FAWCO. For more information, visit their website at [www.fawco.org](http://www.fawco.org)