

VOA News

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Pop icon Ricky Martin has gone to the United Nations to appeal for global action to protect children from sexual predators.

The singer perhaps best known for his hit song *Livin' La Vida Loca* is making a sobering appeal for a crackdown on the child sex tourism industry.

"I want to see abolition of this slavery, and in order for that happen, I need leaders, I need the governments to be part of this. I need the world to step out of denial and see this for what it is. This is a very intense crime and it's happening all over the world."

The 32-year-old Puerto Rican sensation has become a leading spokesman in the fight against exploitation of children. He came to the United Nations to spur ambassadors and world leaders to action against what he called a \$7 billion a year criminal enterprise.

"We have to scream this issue. Like I said before, there's a lot of people in denial out there, and even the victims do not know that they are victims."

Addressing a packed conference room at U.N. headquarters, Martin referred to sex tourism as 'organized crime'. He singled out Cambodia and the Philippines as among the favorite destinations of sex tourists.

Also at the U.N. news conference, Homeland Security official Michael Garcia said the United States is cracking down on sex tourists. He pointed to a recently-passed law that lengthens jail terms and reduces the standard of proof in child sex cases.

In the 10 years before its passage, only two cases were filed against child sex tourists in the United States. Since the so-called Protect Act went into effect last year, the number of prosecutions has risen to seven.

Peter Heinlein, VOA news, the United Nations.