

## Kathryn Bolkovac: interview with the original 'Whistleblower'

Nebraska policewoman Kathryn Bolkovac served as a peacekeeper in post-war Bosnia and outed the U.N. for covering up a sex scandal. As her book 'The Whistleblower' is published, Alastair Good meets her.

By Alastair Good

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*Kathryn Bolkovac's story was first published this week in her expose memoir, 'The Whistleblower: Sex Trafficking, Military Contractors, and One Woman's Fight for Justice'. It has also been made into a film starring Monica Bellucci, Rachel Weisz and David Strathairn, due for release in the summer.*

"Do not read if you have a weak stomach or a guilty conscience"

So began the email that former DynCorp employee and International Police Task Force IPTF member Kathryn Bolkovac alleges led to her eventual sacking from her job battling sex trafficking in post-Dayton agreement Bosnia.

The email warned her fellow employees of the danger of seeing trafficked women as 'just prostitutes' whose services they could use with immunity and she reminded them that people trafficking 'is serious organised crime, making huge amounts of money in this country'.

The path that led to Bolkova sending that email began a year earlier when she answered a DynCorp advert on the bulletin board of the Lincoln Police Department seeking ‘active/retired police officers of any rank who are eager to accept a challenging and rigorous assignment to serve with the United Nations International Police Task Force, as international police monitors for one year.’

“I was hoping that it was going to be a job where I would be representing my country in a professional way with a lot of elite officers from across the United States.”

Bolkovac writes in her book, *The Whistleblower*, that when she arrived for training at DynCorp’s training HQ in Fort Worth Texas she met a group of young, inexperienced former cops who “delighted in discussing the sort of weaponry they’d be able to use” and “retirees who were looking to top up their pensions.”

It was the boast of one of these older men that he knew where to find ‘really nice twelve-to-fifteen year olds’ that would come back to haunt Bolkova when she raided her first sex trafficking brothel.

When a young girl was found wandering disorientated and disheveled along the banks of the river Bosna, Bolkovac followed a lead to the Florida nightclub nearby. Bolkovac writes that after breaking down a door inside the club she discovered seven young women huddled together on filthy mattresses with a bin full of used condoms beside them.

She explained: “As a police officer working in sex crime in Nebraska I’d learned to keep a professional distance but I couldn’t help but think of my daughters who were similiar ages and how lucky they were to not have been born into the situation that these girls were.”

It wasn’t long before Bolkovac began to see reports coming across her desk that implicated international staff in the sex trafficking industry.

“The majority of the reports were of the staff perpetuating the trade by using the brothels, but there were those very specific incidents where people were caught purchasing women outright from the bars, not just going there and buying an hours worth of use.”

Bolkovac said she had a very strong sense of her job as a police officer, developed by good role models in the Nebraska Police Department. In Bosnia she had hoped to make a difference, to inspire the local police and to work with the best of international law enforcement. Once she saw the problems in the country she thought it was only a matter of pointing them out to her superiors so that they could be fixed.

“When I got reports that indicated the involvement of internationals I would then pass it on to UN

Internal Affairs. Generally that information never went anywhere once it got to IA, sometimes a folder would come back to my desk with a handwritten note from a UN high official reading ‘this matter has been dealt with a month ago’ with no indication of what kind of investigation, if any, was done.”

A straight talking Nebraskan, Bolkovac still clung to the belief that if she could just let the right people know what was going on then the situation would be addressed. It was this naive belief that led her to emailing fifty people from the mission including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Jacques Paul Klein with details of specific reports she had seen of women who had been trafficked into Bosnia and who were being used by internationals, including some from the UN.

Bolkovac soon found herself demoted to a more junior position and it wasn’t long before she was called in to the IPTF office and summarily fired for ‘falsifying timesheets and gross-misconduct.’

It was a difficult time for Bolkovac, alone in a foreign country where she didn’t speak the language, she had no one to turn to except a Dutch UN investigator Jan who she’d met when their missions overlapped by six weeks.

“He and I spoke everyday and he knew the kind of person I was and the kind of investigations I was involved in and he was worried for my safety.”

Bolkovac decided to start recording her encounters with DynCorp and UN staff before leaving Bosnia.

The material she gathered, together with documents she had started copying when she first suspected that her reports were not being followed up, was to prove invaluable when she launched her unfair dismissal case in the British port of Southampton. This is where DynCorp was then registered (it has since changed its country of registration to Dubai).

The tribunal found in Bolkovac’s favour and awarded her damages in the region of \$175,000.

Bolkovac was due to testify at the tribunal of another Dyncorp employee, Ben Johnston, who had claimed Dyncorp workers at the airbase in Bosnia where he worked were regularly having sex with twelve to fifteen year old children whom they sold on to each other as slaves, noting each victim’s particular abilities.

However, when her trial ended and she called Johnston’s attorneys she discovered that he had agreed to accept an undisclosed amount to drop the case and had also signed a gagging order, something that Bolkovac refused to do when offered a settlement.

She said: “I really wanted this to be publicised in a way that it would stop and for me the money was not important, of course at the time I didn’t realise how much this was going to ruin my life and my career but I’m that hard headed that I wouldn’t have done it (even if I had known).”

Bolkovac found herself unemployed and, as far as international police work with the UN went, unemployable.

“I had to use my retirement from the (Nebraska) police dept to live on, I worked part time in entry level positions and I’m still trying to recover financially from (what happened to me) so that I can retire someday.”

In the twelve years since she left Bosnia she still hasn’t regained the same level professionally that she had when she answered the job advert in Lincoln Nebraska.

Dyncorp, on the other hand, has gone on to be named as one of the 50 fastest growing companies in Washington.

*The Whistleblower: Sex Trafficking, Military Contractors, and One Woman's Fight for Justice by Kathryn Bolkovac with Cari Lynn is published by Palgrave Macmillan*