



# Human Rights Foundation

Protecting Human Rights in the Americas

**Trustee Tries to Cancel *The Sugar Babies* Screening at the University of Miami**

MIAMI (November 12, 2009) – Tonight’s screening of *The Sugar Babies* at the University of Miami will be as scheduled despite enormous pressure from a member of the university’s Board of Trustees. One of the board’s senior trustees is Alfonso Fanjul, who is also the Chairman and CEO of Flo-Sun, Inc., a sugar company featured in the film for its inhumane labor practices, which include employing children to work sugar fields in conditions that can best be described as modern-day slavery.

The award-winning, feature-length documentary *The Sugar Babies* is scheduled to be screened tonight at 7 p.m. as part of the Latin American Film Series organized by the University of Miami Center for Latin American Studies. It will be followed by a question and answer session with filmmaker Amy Serrano. Tomorrow, November 13, Serrano will also lead a round table discussion about the film and the current situation of Haitian laborers in the Dominican Republic.

Dominican diplomats also pressured the university to remove the film from the festival. Edgar Aponte, Dominican Minister Counselor, will be attending the event. Aponte works under Carlos Morales Tronco, Dominican Minister of Foreign Affairs, who happens to be the former president and CEO and current shareholder at the Fanjul-owned Central Romana Corporation in the Dominican Republic.

“It is likely that the Fanjuls and their corporate cronies will respond by filling tonight’s screening with ‘sympathizers’ to harass Amy Serrano and try to undermine the power of the film’s message,” said Tom Halvorssen, president of the Human Rights Foundation (HRF) and producer of the film. “But what we have to realize is that here in the United States, they have to play by the rules they are not subject to in the Dominican Republic, where crony capitalism and corruption is the way they operate their business. It is shameful that US taxpayers continue to subsidize the Fanjul and Vicini families’ slavery,” he continues.

This is not the first time sugar interests have tried to prevent the dissemination of the film. In 2008, *Sugar Babies* was mysteriously pulled from the Miami International Film Festival, and in 2007, Manuel Almanzar, the Dominican Consul General in Miami, was asked to leave a screening of the film at Florida International University after rushing the stage. At a screening of the film in Paris, Serrano was threatened by an audience member who told her people were going to “get” her. The film was also the target of a letter involving Dominican diplomats in Miami. These and other intimidation tactics eventually forced Serrano to relocate from her home in Florida to Louisiana.

The Fanjuls and Vicinis, who own the largest sugar companies in the island, have much to lose from increasing popularity. In September 2009, the U.S. Department of Labor included sugarcane from the Dominican Republic on its [list of products believed to be made from forced child labor](#). The announcement came after numerous screenings of *The Sugar Babies* before members of Congress and representatives of the departments of Labor, State, and Justice as well as the Office for Human Trafficking.

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The film has received much critical acclaim and, in 2008, a segment of the Spanish-language show "Elvira Live" featuring *The Sugar Babies* won an Emmy award. The show included a discussion of the documentary and its impact with Serrano, former United States Ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Commission Armando Valladares, who accompanied the filmmaker on her trips to the Dominican Republic, and HRF's Thor Halvorssen.

*The Sugar Babies: The Plight of the Children of Agricultural Workers in the Sugar Industry of the Dominican Republic* explores the human costs of sugar production on the Caribbean island. With gripping field and hidden camera footage obtained during 18 months of documentation, the film also features interviews with Ambassador of Haiti to the United States Raymond Joseph, then-U.S. Department of State Ambassador John Miller from the Office of Human Trafficking, and a number of other experts and activists.

The 99-minute documentary is in Spanish, Creole, French and English. *The Sugar Babies* was produced through Siren Studios in association with the Hope, Courage, and Justice Project and the Human Rights Foundation.

HRF is an international nonpartisan organization devoted to defending human rights in the Americas. It centers its work on the twin concepts of freedom of self-determination and freedom from tyranny. Its ideals include the belief that all human beings have the rights to speak freely, to associate with those of their own mind, and to leave and enter their countries. Individuals in a free society must be accorded equal treatment and due process under law, and must have the opportunity to participate in the governments of their own countries; HRF's ideals likewise find expression in the conviction that all human beings have the right to be free from arbitrary detention or exile and from interference and coercion in matters of conscience. HRF does not support nor condone violence. HRF's International Council includes former prisoners of conscience such as Bukovsky, Palden Gyatso, Ramón J. Velásquez, Elie Wiesel, and Harry Wu.

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For more information on the screening taking place tonight, please visit [here](#).

To visit *The Sugar Babies* website, click [here](#).