

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Hearing on “Local and Private Sector Initiatives to Combat International Human
Trafficking”
May 7, 2013**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

The Committee will come to order.

One of the big questions of civilization is how we treat those who are most defenseless in our midst and the responsibility that we all have in a society in order to try to come to the aid of the most exploited.

Trafficking in persons is a grievous offense against human dignity that impacts every country on earth, and disproportionately victimizes girls and children.

Experts estimate that more than 20 million people world-wide are subjected to forced labor -- a broad designation that covers everything from debt bondage, to the forced conscription of child soldiers, to the commercial exploitation of millions of women and children trapped in lives of sexual servitude.

But even these jarring statistics can obscure the despair at the heart of these crimes: the harm of trafficking may be more clearly seen in the eyes of an abused, 12-year-old girl who is being robbed of her freedom, her youth, and her hope.

My Chief of Staff, Amy Porter, has worked with young girls in India and Cambodia rescued from brothels and other deplorable situations, whose ages ranged from 16 down to 3 years old.

As we will hear today, these are not just faraway problems affecting the developing world. More than 17,000 people are trafficked into the United States each year, and some have estimated that 100,000 American citizen children are victims within the U.S.

And just this week, the media has reported a federal investigation into the alleged trafficking of two Filipino victims by a Saudi diplomat here in the DC area.

I am proud of the role that this Committee has played in putting human trafficking onto the radar screen of governments everywhere.

In the past 13 years, international peer pressure and the potential threat of U.S. sanctions have pushed many nations to try to avoid the stain of a “Tier 3” designation in the State Department’s annual report, and more than 130 countries have enacted anti-trafficking laws.

Of course, passing a law is not the same thing as enforcing it, and much work remains to be done to prosecute traffickers and protect victims everywhere.

Subcommittee Chairman Smith, the author of the original TVPA, held an excellent hearing two weeks ago on the State Department's country tier rankings, and I fully expect the Committee to return to those issues again in June, when the Administration releases its annual TIP Report.

The struggle that Chairman Chris Smith and I have had over the last few years is with the State Department and their lack of willingness – their lack of honesty in naming names and in putting on the Tier 3 list those countries that are involved – in the case of Cambodia this corruption goes all the way to the top. It is far past time for this government to be bringing all the pressure we need to bring to bear on regimes around the world that turn a blind eye or -- as is the case with Cambodia -- law enforcement agencies that are actually culpable in these abuses.

However, today's focus is not on the State Department, but on some of the promising local and private sector initiatives that are connecting and empowering communities around the world in the fight against human trafficking.

As is the case in so many endeavors, local communities, individual citizens, and private businesses are often the real engines of change.

In that regard, I am pleased to welcome as one of our witnesses Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe, whose commitment has aided victims and raised awareness among our shared constituents, and throughout the State of California.

The Committee looks forward to learning more today about how these innovative partnerships are developing new tools to defeat traffickers, rescue their victims, and fight the spread of modern-day slavery around the globe.