

Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Hearing on "Regional Perspectives in the Global Fight against Human Trafficking"
Fullerton, California -- November 4, 2013

(As prepared for delivery)

The Committee will come to order.

I am pleased to convene this unprecedented field hearing of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on "Regional Perspectives in the Global Fight Against Human Trafficking." I want to thank California State University, Fullerton for assisting us today. I also want to express my appreciation to our Acting Ranking Member, Congresswoman Karen Bass, who was a leader on these issues, even during her tenure as Speaker of the California State Assembly.

Human trafficking is today's slavery --- a global scourge that devastates the lives of over 20 million people around the world, especially women and girls, many here at home.

I am proud of the role that the Foreign Affairs Committee has played in forcing this issue onto the agenda, especially the federal government's agenda, starting over a decade ago. In 2000, the groundbreaking Trafficking Victims Protection Act was passed. Among its many initiatives, this law created the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, and instituted the annual "Tier Rankings" of countries around the world. The State Department didn't welcome this focus. The diplomats didn't want to rock relations with other countries. But press on we did, and we must continue to do so.

Since 2000, more than 130 countries have enacted anti-trafficking laws, due in part to U.S. pressure. Sadly though, the enactment of laws is not the same as enforcement. And without continued vigilance, progress is temporary: It is worrisome that twice as many countries were downgraded in this year's Tier Rankings than were upgraded since last year. Those recent trends are in the wrong direction. We appreciate that our nation's point person to the world, Ambassador CdeBaca, is here with us today to discuss these developments.

Trafficking is a global problem, but not a faraway problem. With increasing globalization and transnational gang and criminal activity, it is hard to draw much of a line between domestic and international human trafficking. The communities of this region suffer from both.

At a Committee hearing in May, held in Washington, L.A. County Supervisor Don Knabe testified about girls as young as 10 years old trapped in the sex trade on the streets of Los Angeles.

In the last two years alone, the Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force has assisted more than 250 victims. Ninety-three percent were women, and more than 80 of them were from foreign countries.

The Salvation Army's Network of Emergency Trafficking Services in Orange County reports that a full third of their clients – 33 percent– were recruited in a foreign country by an unscrupulous labor recruiter.

We must act.

That is why I recently introduced H.R. 3344, the Fraudulent Overseas Recruitment and Trafficking Elimination Act of 2013. The FORTE Act:

- Requires that prospective foreign workers be given accurate information about the terms of employment, and anti-trafficking protections under U.S. law;
- Prohibits recruitment fees or hidden charges sometimes used as coercive leverage over workers;
- Requires foreign labor recruiters to register and remain in good standing with the Department of Labor;
- And it provides new incentives and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that recruiters and employers follow these disclosure and registration requirements.

The bill also requires the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development ensure that U.S. foreign aid programs do not contribute to human trafficking. If we are helping build a hospital, don't use bricks made by slaves. I look forward to input from other experts and colleagues as to how this bill might be strengthened as it moves forward, which is one of the goals of this hearing.

As my Chief of Staff can tell you, based on her volunteer work with trafficked girls in Cambodia and India: You don't see the harm of human trafficking most clearly in numbers or statistics. You see it in the eyes of the individual person whose life is being stolen and whose dignity is being assaulted, for the profit of someone else.

Thankfully, as we will hear today, Southern California is also on the cutting edge of attempts to fight traffickers and rescue and protect victims. I want to thank our witnesses – and especially our courageous survivors – for being here to share their insights and expertise with the Committee. Your message will be heard loud and wide, and certainly back in Washington, DC.