



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Jim Baird

Joint Investigations & Oversight and
Research & Technology Subcommittee Hearing

The Role of Technology in Countering Trafficking in Persons

July 28, 2020

Thank you, Chairman Foster and Chairwoman Stevens, for convening today's hearing to examine the role of science and technology in disrupting the horrendous trade of human trafficking.

Nearly 25 million people worldwide are exploited and subjected to forced labor through human trafficking every year. To say human trafficking is a monumental challenge would be an understatement. It is a challenge that requires a global response. It requires international coordination and engagement between government, industry, non-profit organizations, and academia.

This year is the 20th anniversary of the signing of the United Nation's Trafficking in Persons Protocol and the enactment of the United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Over the last 20 years, public awareness of human trafficking has grown substantially. Reporting and detection of trafficking is also up globally. This anniversary is an opportunity to recognize the progress that's been made. But it is also a chance for us to look to the future to examine and accelerate new tools to prevent, combat, and end human trafficking over the next 20 years.

Technology will play a critical role in combatting human trafficking in the future. Although technology can be a tool in the hands of the trafficker, it can also be a key tool in our efforts to combat trafficking. Today, we see NGOs, governments and industry using technology to protect victims, stop traffickers, and prevent trafficking by identifying and dismantling the systems that allow them to operate. We are lucky to have experts in these fields with us today as our witnesses.

I would also like to applaud the work of the Trump Administration in strengthening the Federal

responsiveness to human trafficking and encouraging increased collaboration from government, industry, and law enforcement.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not mention how the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the need for all stakeholders to work together in this fight. We know persons who are targeted by traffickers tend to be the most vulnerable. Isolation and the closure of critical services caused by the pandemic means the number of vulnerable people susceptible to exploitation by traffickers is rapidly growing.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on how their organizations are utilizing research and technology to stem this tide and strengthen efforts to combat human trafficking. Thank you all for taking your time to be here with us this morning and I yield back the balance of my time.