

STATEMENT OF
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BEFORE THE
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"Regional Perspectives in the Global Fight Against Human Trafficking."

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Mr. Chairman, Ms. Bass, Members of the Committee: good morning, thank you for the invitation to testify today, and thank you for your commitment to the fight against trafficking in persons. The bipartisan leadership of Congress over the last 13 years has been instrumental in spurring progress in anti-trafficking efforts here at home and around the world. Working across parties and Administrations, we have sent a clear message that the United States rejects all forms of slavery in the 21st century, and makes it a priority to respond to this crime wherever it exists.

Firm as we are in that commitment, it's important still to understand just what this crime is and why we must combat it. Trafficking in persons is an umbrella term for all the conduct involved in reducing a person to, or holding a person in, a state of compelled service, whether for sex or labor.

What does that mean, exactly?

To answer that question, we listen to the stories of those who have been ensnared by human trafficking schemes: the man who boarded a fishing boat with the promise of a good job, but who instead was forced to work 20 hours a day for months on end, beaten, starved, and told he could keep working or lose his life; the woman who thought she could provide better for her family by working as a maid in a foreign country, but who instead found herself cut off from the outside world, never given a day off, her passport confiscated, her wages withheld, abused and raped by her "employer;" the child prostituted in a brothel, enduring unspeakable exploitation; the teenager aspiring to a different life, and manipulated by promises of love and

opportunity.

There are many, many more examples of the way traffickers exact this sort of exploitation. Trafficking occurs whenever and wherever people are willing to deprive others of freedom for their own benefit. It's a crime that victimizes men, women, and children; migrants, and people who have never left home; remote countries, and communities just like this one.

That's why a hearing like this one is so valuable. It reminds us that trafficking in persons isn't just a crime that occurs in faraway places. And it reminds us that efforts to combat trafficking in persons aren't just carried out from Washington's halls of power.

This is a crime that must be dealt with at every level of government—in every town hall, courthouse, and police precinct across the country. Because no community is immune. It must be dealt with because modern slavery undermines the rule of law and justice. It tears at the fabric of our families and our communities. And it is an affront to our most dearly held values of human rights, freedom, and dignity for all people.

So what are the best ways to respond to this crime? Today I'd like to talk about the way we use partnerships at the federal level to advance our work, and about the way partnerships at all levels are an essential tool in the struggle against modern slavery.

Why are partnerships so important?

They're important because, while trafficking in persons is first and foremost a crime, it's also an issue that touches many other areas: labor, immigration, health, agriculture, and transportation to name a few. That's why we need to spread understanding about what this crime is and how it intersects with various areas of concern and jurisdiction. Then we need to share information and practices, and cooperate on efforts to protect victims and prosecute traffickers.

At the federal level, partnerships are at the center of our anti-trafficking efforts. Once again, in this area, we owe Congress a great deal of thanks. The lawmakers who crafted our modern anti-trafficking law, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, had the vision to establish a whole-of-government structure to address this crime: the President's Interagency Task Force to

Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. This cabinet-level body meets every year, most recently in May, to review progress across the Administration and chart our path forward.

This year, the Task Force focused on four main areas to guide our efforts.

First, we want to improve victim services. Finding victims and getting them out of harm's way is the first critical step in stopping this crime. Following through to ensure victims get the support and services they need is essential for helping them move past their exploitation and choose the futures they want for themselves. With these factors in mind, our colleagues at the Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services, and Homeland Security have been leading the effort, in collaboration with other Federal agencies to develop a comprehensive action plan on victim services here in the United States.

Second, we're taking a hard look at government procurement. The U.S. government is the single largest purchaser of goods and services in the world. We need to be sure taxpayer dollars aren't being used to fuel modern slavery. Last year, President Obama issued an Executive Order to strengthen our zero-tolerance policy on human trafficking in government contracting. The Office of Management and Budget along with my office and our federal partners are presently working to implement this order.

Third, we want to strengthen the rule of law in the areas that deal with modern slavery. The Department of Justice, working with the Departments of Homeland Security and Labor, has stood up six Anti-Trafficking Coordination—or ACTeams. These teams of federal agents and prosecutors are working to develop high-impact trafficking cases. These agencies participate in a week-long, advanced human trafficking training programs to promote the exchange of expertise among national human trafficking experts. In another effort that was launched just last month, the State Department, working with DOJ, DHS, and other law enforcement agencies, identified 10 potential countries to launch new initiatives with U.S. embassies to increase the flow of trafficking-related law enforcement information from host countries to our own law enforcement and intelligence agencies. This sort of cross-border collaboration will help us identify victims and human traffickers both in the United States and around the globe.

Finally, we will continue to make public awareness a top priority. After all, this is a crime that touches all our lives, whether through its effect on the communities in which we live, or its role in the production of the coffee we drink, the clothes we wear, or the technology we rely on. It happens in the hotels we stay in and restaurants we visit. We also realize, that as much progress as we've made in recent years, government alone can't solve this problem.

That's why our partnership approach at the federal level includes many more stakeholders than just federal agencies. We're working with partners in the survivor community, private sector, the faith community, civil society, academia, and the public to seek input, increase knowledge, develop new innovations, and share effective practices.

We're working with government and industry leaders in supply chain management and other stakeholders to help Federal agencies and businesses address the potential risk of trafficking in the supply chains. We're partnering with legal experts in the private sector to develop resources for pro bono legal services networks to enhance the services available to trafficking victims. We've advised businesses interested in developing staff training on the indicators of human trafficking. And we've seed-funded innovative anti-trafficking partners in order to replicate and scale up efforts to engage consumers, support hotlines overseas, and build civil society capacity, to name a few.

Despite the progress we've made at the federal level, with our partners inside and outside government, we know that the next stage of this struggle is confronting this issue at the local level. After all, the first law enforcement official likely to come in contact with a trafficking victim isn't an FBI agent, but a local patrol officer or sheriff's deputy. The first justice official a trafficking victim will meet in a legal proceeding probably isn't a federal prosecutor, but an assistant DA or a local magistrate.

And the reality of this crime, and the needs of its victims, are clearer at the local level than anywhere else. So in the years ahead, we hope more and more local-level partnerships will emerge to help drive this effort forward.

Now, the partnership model we've adopted at the federal level won't be the right fit for every community. But there are elements of effective

partnerships that we hope state and local government will look to as they make partnerships a part of the way they deal with this crime.

For example, we need to make sure at all levels that anyone who might encounter a trafficking victim has the knowledge to recognize what they're seeing, and the information about what to do next. We need to make sure that justice and law enforcement officials are working together with caregivers and advocates, so that victims get the support and resources they need and their abusers can be held to account.

Here in California, we find some excellent examples of cross-cutting collaboration between governments and civil society groups.

California's regional anti-trafficking task forces are employing a comprehensive, victim-centered approach. On these task forces we find law enforcement and local, state, and federal prosecutors, as well as other governmental leaders and NGOs.

In this area there are two regional anti-trafficking task forces doing particularly great work: the Los Angeles Metro Area Task Force, of which CAST is a co-chair. You'll be hearing from CAST CEO Kay Buck on the next panel. Also, we're seeing real results from the Orange County Task Force. They are clear examples of how law enforcement and NGO collaboration leads to effective responses that punish traffickers and provide care to victims.

Across the country, we're seeing innovative partnerships and task forces making a difference from Houston to Seattle to Chicago. And today I want to reiterate to this Committee and this community: the Obama Administration will stand with you and with anyone who takes this problem seriously and is committed to combating modern slavery. Because whether in Southern California, or Washington, or halfway around the world, this crime cannot be tolerated. To the survivors of trafficking – and those still trapped in modern slavery – we see you. We hear your voices and will not rest in the face of this abuse. Although we're facing a monumental challenge, I'm confident that by working in partnership, our shared goal is within reach: a world free from modern slavery.

Thank you and I'm eager to answer your questions.

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