

TLHRC Hearing: Modern Day Slavery

Thursday, 24 July 2014

2244 Rayburn HOB

10:00 AM - Noon

[Welcome everyone]

Good morning. I want to thank everyone for being here today for this important hearing on international human trafficking and forced labor.

In particular, I want to thank the staff of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for coordinating this hearing, and our witnesses for their leadership in combating modern day slavery. I welcome our distinguished panelists, including from the Administration and representatives from the non-governmental, human rights and humanitarian communities. I look forward to hearing from them what diplomatic and humanitarian measures are needed to address this humanitarian crisis.

That, in the 21st century, over 20 million people worldwide find themselves living in conditions of modern day slavery is an affront to humanity and our basic liberties enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to the International Labour Organization's 2012 findings, 22% are victims of forced sexual exploitation with 68% victims of forced labor.

These men, women, and children are unconscionably subjugated to conditions of slavery for the sake of a profit. According to a new ILO report, it generates \$150 billion in illegal profits each year. Of this, two thirds is generated from sexual exploitation with approximately \$51 billion generated as a result of forced labor.

Trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation has historically been the most commonly reported—and prosecuted—form of human trafficking globally. However, in our globalized economy with increasing demands for cheap migrant labor worldwide, labor trafficking has become an insidious growth industry as it is inadequately regulated and preys on the vulnerable. Victims of forced labor and debt bondage are held in conditions of slavery in a variety of jobs, including agricultural and construction work, domestic servitude and other labor-intensive jobs.

Vulnerable men, women, and children trying to provide for their families are often the targets of exploitation and trafficking as a means to minimize overhead costs and provide cheaper goods at market, while providing maximum profits to corporations. The spreading of forced labor has therefore led to an increase in its effects on the production, handling, and distribution of various goods.

By now, we have all heard stories of shoppers finding desperate cries for help, in the forms of notes stuffed into bags or stitched into clothing tags exported from factories worldwide to shops in our neighborhoods. More recently we have heard about the harsh conditions endured by migrants and refugees forcibly employed in the fishing trade in Thailand.

If we are to root out this horrific scourge on humanity, we must have a multifaceted approach to combat the root problems of this crisis and hold accountable governments of countries that are sources, destinations, or transit centers for the innocent victims of trafficking and forced labor.

I want to express my appreciation to Secretary of State John Kerry and Ambassador Luis CdeBaca and the staff of his office for their conviction and commitment to addressing these human rights violations and paving the road from victim to survivor as expressed in the newly released 2014 Trafficking in Persons report. Though we have truly made progress, I feel certain Ambassador CdeBaca would be the first to agree that there is still much more to do before we can live in a world rid of slavery and exploitation.

Congress must ensure we work harder to eradicate this egregious human rights violation. To that end, on June 11th, Representatives Maloney and Smith introduced *HR 4842, the Business Supply Chain Transparency on Trafficking and Slavery Act of 2014*. This legislation seeks to “to require certain companies to disclose information describing any measures the company has taken to identify and address conditions of forced labor, slavery, human trafficking, and the worst forms of child labor within the company's supply chains”. However, as this is a global problem, so too the solution must be global. The U.S. government must play a role in supporting global initiatives, such as *the ILO Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930* and *ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers*.

Today's hearing will examine current trends in human trafficking and forced labor across the globe. I hope in addition to outlining shortcomings in the battle on human trafficking, it will also highlight key successes and initiatives.

It is time now to hear from our witnesses. I would like to submit into the record any oral testimony along with written testimony provided by the witnesses today.

The first witness I would like to welcome is Ambassador Luis CdeBaca of the US State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons.

Ambassador, thank you for your time--if you would please begin.