

**Statement of  
Honorable Sean D. Reyes, Utah Attorney General  
Before the Tom Lantos Commission on Human Rights  
March 1, 2016**

My name is Sean D. Reyes and I serve as the 21st Attorney General of the Great State of Utah. I regret not being able to testify in person on a human rights crisis of such importance to our nation and our world as is human trafficking. After the original briefing was postponed due to the storm in the East, I was unable to reschedule my previous commitments. At the time this briefing occurs, I will be helping to host a number of state attorneys general from Mexico who are traveling to the United States to be trained on disrupting crimes such as human trafficking.

**INTRODUCTION**

In my capacity as the top law enforcement officer of my state, I have many duties that compel me to confront the scourge of human trafficking. I am the direct supervisor of the statewide Secure Strike Force, a law enforcement team comprised of full-time investigative agents from the Utah Attorney General's Office and part-time assets from numerous federal, state, county and city agencies tasked with investigating human trafficking cases. My office also helps steer the statewide Trafficking in Persons Taskforce, we administer through our office a grant for investigation, prosecution and victim resources and oversee a prosecution team of Assistant Attorneys General focused on convicting traffickers.

As you are likely aware, Human Trafficking is a form of modern day slavery that exists around the world. By many accounts, it is the fastest growing and second most lucrative international crime, surpassing multi-billion dollar enterprises like counterfeiting and gun running/arms dealing and trailing only the sale of drugs in terms of sales volume. Some believe it has already caught up with and perhaps surpassed drug dealing. In a number of ways, it is more devastating to the victims than any of the other aforementioned crimes. Depending on the reporting agency or organization, anywhere from 20-40 million people are currently victims of trafficking worldwide. A disproportionate number of victims are women (though male victims do exist) and a significant number of victims are children. The toll on individual victims is incomprehensible while the dollar costs to society to deal with the short and long term, evident and latent effects of physical, mental, emotional and psychological servitude can be calculated in hundreds of millions of dollars in health care and other resources.

The majority of trafficking involves sexual slavery, with victims either being sold for sex, exploited as objects of pornography or often subjected to both horrors. But sex exploitation is not the only manifestation of this great evil. A significant number of victims are impressed into servitude as labor trafficking victims, working under life threatening conditions with no hope of escape. Other victims fall prey to the black market human organ trade, to illegal adoptions or are bought and conscripted into the armies of warlords, pirates and organized crime around the world. Yet others are purchased like toys for thousands or as little as hundreds of dollars by terrorists and in some cases utilized involuntarily as suicide bombers. Some victims of sex trafficking have told me (and one testified with me before another U.S. Congressional Committee) that they are forced to have sex with dozens or even scores of "johns" daily, which

can amount to thousands or tens of thousands of forced sexual relations over years. Imagine not only the physical abuse but the ravaging of one's spirit and soul having to endure such torture.

The chances of escape or survival are both slim. Even when opportunities present themselves for escape, too often the victims remain in the hell they are living for fear that the perpetrators will harm family members in their country of origin or family that is nearby. Of all the crimes I fight on a daily basis, human trafficking, is a form of terrorism and torture that needs our attention. While I am only one small voice among many, I am committed to sounding an alarm that will hopefully awaken all around us to the menace that lurks in our midst.

Fighting Trafficking is not particularly a Democrat issue or Republican issue, it is a humanitarian issue and we need all voices joined together. The cold, indiscriminate hand of trafficking can reach out and torment rich and poor alike, men and women, young and old, developed nations or emerging ones. It is no respecter of persons, rank or station. But one silver lining that it presents is the chance to galvanize disparate interests around one cause. It can unite us in an often divided and partisan nation and world. I have stood shoulder to shoulder with many allies and friends from all different backgrounds who may not share many of my political, personal, religious views or values but who are committed, like me, to do anything in our power to eradicate trafficking. I apologize for the length of this introduction. This is flowing from my mind to the page with no edits. In the remaining paragraphs, I will address areas I believe are essential to sustained success in combating human trafficking. These are also areas where my office and I have labored to push knowledge, policies, practices and prayers through to diminish demand, disrupt current trafficking operations, deter future trafficking and, perhaps, most importantly, help victims become survivors and survivors to become "thrivers" with support, resources and empowerment along the lengthy road to healing, recovery and feelings of redemption.

## **EDUCATION**

This is a critical component of the fight. The world is in too much ignorance but we are starting to achieve a critical mass of understanding and recognition. The areas I have personally participated in along with my office include:

- Testifying before Congress and writing Op Eds and Opinion pieces on the subject;
- Educating the public through speaking engagements, school assemblies, PSAs, etc.;
- Supporting the making and release of films like the Abolitionists by Gerald R. Molen, the director and Executive Producer of Schindler's List, Rain Man and other remarkable films;
- Keynoting and conducting training with federal, state and local law enforcement;
- Speaking to first responders, physicians and healthcare professionals, chambers of commerce, social organizations like Rotary and Kiwanis;

- Speaking to large and small corporations and other business entities, including industry organizations;
- Speaking at numerous places of worship from various world religions to engage the faith community;
- Speaking to gatherings of lawyers, judges and law makers;
- Hosting numerous delegations from foreign countries so they can become more educated on the issue;
- Promoting resources like a state and national hotline;
- Promoting Awareness through Social Media; and
- Speaking at fundraisers and awards galas around the country for fighting trafficking.

## **LEGISLATION**

In order to effectively prosecute trafficking crimes, protect victims in the process and disincentivize demand, we must continue to pass laws in our states, nation and worldwide that will effectuate these outcomes. Our office has:

- Helped draft and support statewide legislation that is victim centered and that gives prosecutors tools to more easily prosecute offenders;
- Testified in support of national legislation like an International Megan's Law for mandating reciprocal reporting when known child sex offenders are traveling internationally; and
- Supported international initiatives and resolutions to combat the crime more seriously and more universally in worldwide.

## **COLLABORATION**

We must also harness all of the considerable momentum and energy that is starting to surround this issue so that we may maximize resources and be more efficient and effective. To that end, I and my team have:

- Worked with NGO's from around the world like Polaris Project, Airline Ambassadors and Shared Hope International to coordinate different aspects of fighting trafficking and rescuing victims;
- Worked and trained with various law enforcement agencies to share cutting edge techniques and technologies;
- Partnered with small to very large, Fortune 500 businesses particularly in the technology

sector to be able to develop new cutting edge technologies and investigative techniques;

- Worked with media partners to raise awareness; and
- Worked with federal and state government agencies outside of law enforcement to address issues like sanctuary, job training, education, therapy and health care for victims.

## **INVESTIGATION**

Trafficking cases are difficult, time and labor intensive cases. Our office has led out in our state with our internal investigative law enforcement unit which is enhanced by scores of agents from other law enforcement agencies. We have:

- Led the investigation and takedown of major human trafficking rings in our state;
- I personally conduct surveillance with my men and women to better educate myself on the inner workings of such cases;
- I traveled to Cartagena, Colombia (not officially as Utah AG) with an NGO called Operation Underground Railroad at the invitation of the Colombian Government to set up an elaborate sex trafficking sting, in which we cooperated with Colombian officials in a three city simultaneous operation to successfully takedown what many have called the largest single child sex trafficking bust in history. We liberated over 120 young children that day from the clutches of sex traffickers who were more than willing to sell girls and boys as young as 11 years old to any paying customer. We also trained and assisted local law enforcement so they could replicate that operation many more times. They have effectively nullified child sex trafficking in what used to be one of the hottest areas of traffic;
- We have expanded in-state resources to the investigative side, expanded sting operations and deployed new techniques and technologies to more effectively combat traffickers. Using big data, predictive technology, pornography detecting software and other proprietary techniques, we believe we are and will be more effective in being able to see patterns and anticipate and disrupt trafficking; and
- Our Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force has engaged to assist on a number of investigations.

## **PROSECUTION**

Serious prosecutions of perps are a huge deterrent to future illicit conduct while also bringing to justice the offenders. Our office has:

- Helped draft and support legislation giving more teeth to our human trafficking statute;
- Aggressively Prosecuted cases like State of Utah v. Rax, involving a notorious Central American gang leader, narco-trafficker and human trafficker who had terrorized at least sixty

known victims and likely hundreds of more. He was arrested in Utah where he had been trafficking kids for over ten years. This was one of the largest and most significant trafficking cases of the last decade according to various groups in the trafficking world. Polaris Project uses it as a case study on how to investigate and prosecute a case; and

- We also work with other agencies to advise or help on their trafficking cases.

## **REHABILITATION**

Though not my favorite word for helping victims in the healing and recovery process, this is in my mind the most important part of the equation in the comprehensive fight against trafficking. Our office has expended a great deal of time and resources to:

- Focus on victims in our education, focus on victims and recovery in legislation, focus on victims during investigations, arrests and prosecution;
- Defer prosecuting under the Trafficking Statutes when other crimes are available like money laundering to avoid re-victimizing the victims and to keep them safe;
- Allowing them to share their stories in court of victimization even after the offender (Rax) took his own life during pendency of trial to allow catharsis and feelings of empowerment that their voices and stories would be heard;
- Partnering with as many agencies at federal, state and local level to get service to victims and partnering with NGOs and non-profits to get private resources injected into the recovery and healing journey;
- Meeting with, listening to victims in the United States and other countries (e.g., spent time at a secret sanctuary in Mexico to listen to the stories of child sex trafficking victims);
- Finding willing victims to share their stories at speaking events where I am scheduled to speak;
- Making appearances and speeches at events like Sundance Film Festival with victims to raise awareness;
- Applying and receiving grant funds targeted to victim advocacy and resources such as job training, education and overall wellness; and
- Allocating more resources internally to victims issues.

## CONCLUSION

Human Trafficking is one of the great pandemics of our time—an evil, sui generis, that deserves our most serious attention. Only by working together with influential bodies like the Lantos Commission on Human Rights will we be able to marshal properly the resources and resolve of our worldwide brothers and sisters to end this fight one day with victory. The Great Kamehameha I, uniter of the Hawaiian Islands and my ancestor, once summoned his male and female warriors in the pivotal battle of Iao Valley, severely outnumbered. “Imua e na poki’I, a inu i ka wai ‘awa’awa” he exhorted. Come forward my brothers and sisters to battle. And then he encouraged, “Let us taste of the sweet waters of battle, because there is no turning back.” Never have those words been more appropriate to this test we face. Many in this fight feel alone and incapable of defeating this dark institution. They are not alone. We are not alone in this fight.

This concludes my statement.