



**Testimony of
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**US House of Representatives
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing
On
Combatting Forced Labor and Modern Day Slavery
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this important hearing and inviting World Vision to testify. This Commission has been a leader in the fight against forced labor, human trafficking, and modern day slavery. We are especially grateful that you have championed programs to protect vulnerable children. Children around the world are alive, and contributing to their communities and countries, because of these programs. Your efforts have led to an increased U.S. focus on displaced children, orphans, children affected by armed conflict, and children trafficked for sex or labor. Thanks to your tireless efforts, America remains a global leader in combatting these and other critical issues that impact and endanger children. This hearing is an opportunity to shine a light on what is happening globally to address forced labor and discuss how the U.S. can strengthen its role as a global partner in those efforts.

World Vision is a Christian relief, development, and advocacy organization serving millions of children and families in nearly 100 countries. Our 45,000 employees are dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities to tackle

the root causes of poverty and injustice. This work includes emergency relief and preparedness for people impacted by natural disasters and armed conflict; long-term economic development; preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children; mobilizing children, youth and local communities to hold their governments accountable; and advocating for effective systems, laws, and policies that protect vulnerable populations where the social fabric is especially weak.

World Vision U.S. has more than one million private donors in every state and Congressional district, partners with over 16,000 churches in the United States, and works with corporations and foundations. We are part of the global federation of World Vision International, which last year implemented more than \$2.6 billion in programming to help children and communities through international relief, development, and advocacy assistance. Although private donors support much of our work, the U.S. Government is an invaluable partner. We leverage this partnership to reach many more children at-risk and ensure that the precious resources of the American taxpayer are prudently used to promote and protect the well-being of children and communities abroad.

World Vision has been asked to testify about our experience preventing and responding to forced labor and human trafficking. To highlight the pervasive and diverse nature of labor trafficking, our testimony will focus on what we are seeing on-the-ground, contrasting East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa: A region that is increasingly vital to the global marketplace and another that has some of the fastest growing economies in the world and hopes to likewise be vital. Yet both regions are deeply and negatively impacted by forced labor and the U.S. has a

strong part to play in addressing the causes and the impacts. Our testimony will discuss the U.S. role in combatting forced labor and human trafficking and the impact of programs (U.S. funded and non-U.S. funded) and funding that aim to prevent these crimes. The opportunity is now, and tools are available, to make U.S. engagement and funding more coordinated, effective, and efficient. Together with partners around the world, we can ensure that global economic growth is built on the strengths of a nation's people, not on their backs through bondage.

East Asian countries are essential, increasingly influential components of the global economy. African countries like Ethiopia (in east Africa) and Lesotho (in southern Africa), hope to increase their economic clout. Yet both regions are home to large pockets of the poorest, most vulnerable people on Earth.

According to the International Labor Organization, forced labor and human trafficking is a \$150 billion industry. Most media and governmental attention to human trafficking understandably focuses on sex trafficking. However, labor trafficking ensnares more people and makes more money. All of these countries have laws that address human trafficking and fight labor exploitation to varying degrees. However, as in other countries – including America – there is a disconnect between national laws on forced labor and human trafficking and local level implementation and awareness of these laws. In fact, even in countries where there is legislation on labor trafficking, most implementation focuses on sex trafficking (East Asia) or trans-national trafficking (Ethiopia and Lesotho) and often neglects labor trafficking as a priority at the national and local level. As a result, the level of impunity is often high and chances of justice for survivors is often low. There is frequently little reason for employers and traffickers to obey

the law. Furthermore, there are multiple root causes for forced labor and trafficking – including household income levels, lack of education, issues of land tenure, and an increasing demand for cheap, unskilled labor – not just one, which makes addressing these scourges more challenging. Every story is different. They all still point to how governments, civil society, and communities can do better to end modern day slavery.

As in other countries, including America, forced labor and human trafficking take many forms. We see children exploited as child soldiers, textile weavers, working in brick kilns, agriculture, construction, the fishing industry, and forced to be domestic servants.

Migration, within and outside a country's border, is a common factor for many of the children with whom we work. In East Asia, the global marketplace is producing many opportunities to make money in a few nations but is also creating more ways to exploit a person for their labor. Moreover, economic growth in countries like Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia has not been matched in countries like Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam. In the high-growth countries, this creates strong demand for low-skilled labor that their own local populations have been unwilling to meet. As a result, a steady supply of cheap, often exploitable, labor moves from one country to another or from rural areas to urban centers. It is nearly impossible to address the issue of forced labor and human trafficking without talking about migration. We have seen families in communities we work with in Cambodia, the Philippines, and Ethiopia, torn apart by high amounts of debt that they take on to pay the fees that unscrupulous employment agencies often require to secure a job abroad. These jobs are often not what was promised and

can lead into the dark hole of debt bondage. Understanding and addressing what factors push and pull people toward migrating unsafely are critical to preventing and responding to their vulnerability.

Two stories illustrate the varying, yet similarly deep impacts of migration on human trafficking. As the eldest son from a poor family in Myanmar, Min Min felt the pressure to help his family earn money and survive. He befriended a man who came to his village and told him he could get work in Thailand. When Min Min arrived in Thailand by boat, he was immediately sold to an Indonesian fishing vessel. He describes his ordeal Hellish. He was forced to work all night and most of the day for seven days a week. He says he watched his captors torture or kill anyone who tried to escape. For nine years, Min Min toiled on the boat until finally, one night, desperate to escape, he slipped off the boat and swam to shore. He found himself in Indonesia with no food, shoes, nor clothes. He made it to a small village. But because he had no visa or identity documents, there was little that the villagers could do for him. Min Min was finally able to call his family and they contacted World Vision. We worked with Myanmar's government to get Min Min back home and end his ordeal. World Vision's End Trafficking in Persons Program (ETIP) provides direct assistance to trafficking survivors like Min to fully recover from the trafficking harm and re-integrate into life in society.

Wolde is from a rural village in Ethiopia. By age 13, he was out of school and often going to bed hungry, because the wages his single mother made from selling crops from her garden were meager. Wolde's uncle convinced him that he could earn money, have new clothes, and give his mother a better life if Wolde would move with his uncle to Sodo, a city in Ethiopia. As soon as Wolde arrived in

Sodo, he was taken to a small house where he joined five other children who were even younger than him. Each child was responsible for producing seven *gabis* (traditional cotton shawls) per week. The children toiled from dawn till midnight and their owner beat them if they failed to meet their quota. Wolde recalls one boy who became very sick and could not weave and was taken to another town where he was left on the streets. Wolde eventually escaped and is now part of a World Vision program aimed at assisting children like him.

Both stories illustrate where so much can go wrong and what can be done to help prepare migrants for what they might face when they leave home to work. In Myanmar, Vietnam, and Laos, we have worked with scores of children who were promised a job in another city or another country and found a situation that was nothing like they were promised and were forced into a situation where their inherent human worth and dignity is ignored. Cases like these have led World Vision to spend a great deal of effort educating communities and especially children aged 13-17 (those most likely to take a job) on the dangers of risky migration and the proactive steps they can take to prevent themselves from becoming victims.

For instance, throughout East Asia, we provide a pocket guide in local languages called the “Smart Navigator Booklet.” This small, easy-to-understand booklet covers what human trafficking is; provides checklists for maximizing safety while travelling; and even includes basic instructions on how to make an international phone call. In places like Ethiopia and Lesotho, World Vision runs Youth Clubs and local Child Protection Committees that engage and educate young people and their families on the dangers of migrating for work. These simple, effective steps

come from encountering so many Min Min's and Wolde's whose migration to earn money goes wrong.

Both Min Min and Wolde were trafficked for their labor to contribute to a supply chain: An international one for Min, while the shawls that Wolde made were destined for local markets. However, the goal and end result were the same – free, exploitable labor makes inexpensive products for the marketplace. It is highly unlikely consumers knew that children were forced to process the fish they were eating or make shawl they were wearing. Consumers are essential for ending forced labor in supply chains. The U.S. Government is also key.

Labor trafficking taints domestic and international supply chains and threatens companies, consumers, and entire economies. Goods and services produced through exploitation pose a high reputational and financial risk to companies and their investors. Therefore, it is critical for consumers to know what goes into the products they buy.

Business transparency protects workers, companies, and consumers. It creates a level playing field, so that consumers who want to purchase products untainted by forced or exploited labor can reward companies that are making efforts to root out exploitation in their supply chains. While the main burden falls on companies and consumers, there is much governments can do. H.R.4842 – Business Supply Chain Transparency on Trafficking and Slavery Act of 2014 – is an opportunity for the U.S. Government. This bill would require companies with gross sales over \$100 million to post on their websites, and submit to the Securities and Exchange Commission, what the company's policies are on slavery and exploitation in their

supply chain. The bill would not require companies to take any further action and will provide consumers with more knowledge on what companies are doing to ensure that slavery does not taint their products. While not addressing everything, this bill incentivizes companies to look hard at their supply chains and make the efforts necessary to protect their workers, their brand, and their customers.

As the business transparency legislation shows, there is no single intervention or effort that can defeat the use of forced labor and human trafficking in the long term. World Vision programs are most successful when we take a multi-faceted, multi-sector approach to combatting exploitation.

Often times, the most effective efforts seemingly have nothing to do with forced labor and are aimed at strengthening the systems of complete protection for parents and children. For example, World Vision implements the Ethiopians Fighting against Child Exploitation (EFACE). Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and running in twelve districts in Ethiopia, EFACE reaches 20,000 children primarily working in traditional weaving and some in agriculture, domestic servitude, and construction. Child labor in Ethiopia results from factors like poverty, lack of access to quality education, cultural acceptance of child labor, debt, migration, and lack of regulation in the informal sector, particularly in traditional weaving. The program aims to remove kids from dangerous or exploitative working conditions and get them back to school through tutoring and catch-up classes.

The focus on education is particularly important. World Vision research found that the higher the literacy level of a child, the more aware they are of human trafficking. World Vision and our local partners then work with children's parents to increase and diversify household income and to provide safe options for saving and obtaining credit. Access to income and credit reduces the incentive to remove a child from school and send him or her to work. Sustainable ways to earn a living create stability for families, making them less likely to migrate to find work or place their children into risky situations. A regional World Vision project in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda – a model for the EFACE project and also funded by U.S. Department of Labor – used a similar approach that removed nearly 33,000 children out of the worst forms of child labor or prevented them from even being subjected to them.

World Vision also focuses on another key factor that most people take for granted: birth registration. Human traffickers pursue individuals who are vulnerable and powerless. Without a birth certificate, children are an especially easy target.

According to UNICEF, every year 51 million children are never registered at birth, leaving them without an official name or nationality. There are an estimated 135 million unregistered children in East Asia alone. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the situation is more dire, with only 38% of African children currently registered. Children without a birth certificate are often invisible to their government and thus denied basic opportunities and their lives read like a checklist to human traffickers: poor, no education, unable to access safe credit, separated from family with no identification, and unable to verify their age. Lack of age verification also

makes forced marriage easier – an issue in countries all over the world and especially in East Asia and Africa.

Birth registration impacts all aspects of a child's well-being. A birth certificate helps protect children from human trafficking, child labor, early marriage, underage recruitment, and conscription into military service. If a child is abused, neglected, exploited, or exposed to violence, a birth certificate ensures his or her access to services and justice systems. It is also critical for obtaining identity documents needed for trans-border migration for work. It is therefore unsurprising to see that in a World Vision survey, 80% of children in Vietnam, which has almost universal birth registration at 99%, are more aware of the need to travel with identity documents. By comparison, only 60% of children in Burma, which has an 81% registration rate, have such awareness. WV is partnering with Plan International and the UN to organize the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in the Asia and Pacific in November 2014. This is an opportunity to raise awareness and generate governmental action on the foundation for protecting the well-being of children.

In many African nations, the numbers and the level of vulnerability are much worse. In Ethiopia, an astonishing 93% of the population are unregistered, making them extremely vulnerable to unscrupulous labor recruiters who offer foreign jobs seemingly without the need for documentation like a visa or passport. As noted in the 2014 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, Ethiopia recently put a temporary moratorium on foreign labor recruitment to halt the number of Ethiopians who were taking jobs abroad and falling into exploitation. In Lesotho, only 45% of all children under five years old are registered. World Vision works

with the Lesotho government to increase these numbers, especially in rural areas where the low registration rate, coupled with the high number of double orphans (when both parents have died), means that authorities are often unaware that a couple who died of AIDS had any children. This has led to an increase in children living on the street, trafficked for sexual exploitation, or forced to work as domestic servants or cattle herders.¹

The U.S. Government has multiple options for partnering with governments and civil societies in regions as varied as East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa to strengthen the overall response to these crimes and prevent them from happening in the first place. In addition to the diplomatic tool of the TIP Report, the U.S. Government has tools to build on the recommendations of the TIP Report with strategic, bi-lateral partnerships in focus countries. For instance, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2013 included the key provisions of the Child Protection Compact Act (CPCA). This allows the State Department to partner with a government and set measurable goals over a multi-year period to strengthen the protection system for vulnerable children and improve justice systems so they investigate and prosecute those who would exploit a child. This is an exciting opportunity for the U.S. Government to engage deeply on these issues.

Another opportunity lies with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). In 2012, USAID unveiled the agency's Counter Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) Policy. In 2013, they released a field guide for USAID missions to assist in

¹ "Compacting the Fragments: Strengthening the US Government Approach to Child Protection in the Next Decade." Washington D.C. World Vision US, [http://www.worldvision.org/resources.nsf/main/trafficking-report/\\$file/compacting-the-fragments.pdf](http://www.worldvision.org/resources.nsf/main/trafficking-report/$file/compacting-the-fragments.pdf)

the implementation of the Policy. One of the programming objectives calls for USAID to begin integrating CTIP efforts into larger programming sectors, such as agriculture, health, economic growth, education, and humanitarian assistance. This will enable an increase in anti-trafficking efforts that take the multi-faceted approach that is proving effective at targeting the root causes of vulnerability. Furthermore, another programming objective of the CTIP policy is specific CTIP investments in what USAID calls “Critical TIP Challenge Countries.” These are countries that have global, significant strategic importance and have significant trafficking problems. Of particular focus are countries that have spent several years on the Tier 2 Watchlist or Tier 3 of the TIP Report. This creates opportunities for impactful engagement, especially because 14 African countries currently reside on the Watch-list, while nine reside on Tier 3.

Finally, further opportunities exist in the Action Plan for Children in Adversity (APCA). Launched in 2012, the Action Plan unites and aligns 30 offices in seven U.S. Government agencies around the same measurable, achievable goals for international programs relating to vulnerable children. The three main objectives are **strong beginnings** (ensuring children meet early childhood development milestones), **family care first** (making sure every child is in a safe family environment), and **stronger prevention and response** to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The Action Plan, which USAID currently coordinates, enables U.S. Government agencies to coordinate their efforts to make U.S. programs more effective and efficient. The selection of the first focus countries will provide an opportunity to show how coordinated and multi-faceted programs can collectively contribute to reducing the vulnerability of children.

These tools allow for constructive and coordinated bi-lateral engagement that will enable countries to develop and expand the systems of prevention, protection, and prosecution, and ideally address many of the root causes of trafficking in the region. With the right engagement and approaches, we can mitigate trafficking and eliminate it as much as is possible.

Congress has given the Administration good tools. It is critical that we work together so these tools are used and not left to rust in the toolbox. Thank you again for holding this hearing and for all the work you continue to do in the fight against forced labor and human trafficking. World Vision is committed to working with the Commission on these critical issues and I look forward to answering your questions.

Recommendations

- Encourage the Administration to use bi-lateral tools like the Action Plan for Children in Adversity and Child Protection Compact Act that foster collaboration, sustainably strengthen systems of protection, and produce measurable results.
- Support current U.S. Government birth registration efforts by passing the Girls Count Act (H.R. 3398) and urge the U.S. Government to support the implementation of East Asia Ministerial Plan of Action (2015– 2024) that will be finalized during the Ministerial Conference in November 2014.
- Support creating a level playing field for businesses selling goods in the U.S. by passing H.R.4842, the Business Supply Chain Transparency on Trafficking and Slavery Act of 2014.
- Encourage USAID to further roll out their Counter-Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) policy which calls for integrating anti-trafficking efforts into other programs like economic development, emergency response, health, and

education, and other steps, and allocates sufficient resources in TIP Challenge Countries.

