

JUSTICE NEWS

Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer Delivers Remarks at the Trafficking Victims Protection Act 10th Anniversary Event

Washington, D.C. ~ Friday, October 29, 2010

Attorney General Holder, Assistant Attorney General Perez, and distinguished guests: It is an honor for me to be with you today to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act.

The TVPA was a landmark piece of legislation. Among other things, it dramatically expanded our ability to hold human traffickers, and especially child sex traffickers, criminally accountable. In passing the TVPA ten years ago, Congress recognized that existing criminal legislation was inadequate to deter human trafficking and bring traffickers appropriately to justice.

Human trafficking is a reprehensible crime, and children are often the victims of the depraved criminal schemes that we prosecute. Human trafficking truly is a "modern form of slavery."

Since the passage of the TVPA, the Criminal Division has partnered closely with the Civil Rights Division, the U.S. Attorneys' Offices, other federal agencies, and state and local authorities to bring human traffickers to justice and seek appropriate penalties for their crimes.

To give you one example of the level of cooperation we have achieved, last year the Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section partnered with the Civil Rights Division; the U.S. Attorney's Offices in Charlotte, North Carolina and here in the District of Columbia; Immigration and Customs Enforcement; and the police departments here and in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina on a child sex trafficking case against Jorge Flores-Rojas. Flores-Rojas pleaded guilty under the TVPA to trafficking two minor girls, including an undocumented Honduran national, for the purpose of causing them to engage in commercial sex acts in Charlotte and the District of Columbia. He also pleaded guilty to transporting an adult woman across state lines to force her to engage in commercial sex acts. The evidence at sentencing showed that he repeatedly sexually and physically abused at least one of his minor victims. Flores-Rojas was sentenced to 24 years in prison for his crimes.

This level of coordination is typical of the cases we prosecute, and spans across multiple Sections in the Division. In addition to the Child Exploitation Section, for example, which leads the Division's prosecution efforts in this area, our Office of Enforcement Operations approves Title III wiretaps in all human trafficking cases, and our Organized Crime and Racketeering Section has been a consistent partner in the fight against human trafficking. Just recently, nine defendants pleaded guilty in the so-called "Giant Labor Solutions" case in Kansas City, a case prosecuted by the local U.S. Attorney's Office and the Civil Rights Division that was aimed at dismantling an Uzbek organized crime ring engaged in labor racketeering and forced labor of guest workers across 14 states. This case, which yielded a conviction against the sole remaining defendant yesterday, has benefited from close coordination among our Organized Crime Section; the Civil Rights Division; the U.S. Attorney's Office in Kansas City; Immigration and Customs Enforcement; the FBI; and the Department of Labor.

Shortly after the enactment of the TVPA, we also collaborated with the FBI Crimes Against Children Unit and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to establish the Innocence Lost Initiative. Since its creation in 2003, this Initiative has developed 38 task forces and working groups nationwide to investigate and prosecute the commercial sexual exploitation of children and, it has produced more than 500 convictions in state and federal courts across the country.

While our criminal prosecutions are necessary to combat human trafficking, our extensive international efforts are also central – both in terms of conducting investigations and building the capacity of foreign governments to fight trafficking. As Assistant Attorney General Perez described, so many of these cases involve the exploitation of vulnerable foreign nationals. U.S. investigators and prosecutors must interview witnesses and obtain evidence overseas. And all too frequently, trafficking defendants flee the United States to seek safe haven abroad. Our Office of International Affairs has been instrumental in assisting investigations overseas and obtaining extraditions of human traffickers to the United States. These efforts have greatly strengthened our prosecutions here at home.

In addition, through our Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training (or OPDAT), the Division has devoted significant resources to capacity-building abroad. In Fiscal Year 2009, OPDAT conducted 49 programs involving 17 countries to strengthen international efforts to prevent human trafficking. In the last several weeks alone, OPDAT has conducted human trafficking programs in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Mexico, including assisting the creation of a Mexican website devoted exclusively to anti-human trafficking efforts.

There may be no greater success story than in Mexico. There, the Department of Justice, in partnership with the Departments of State and Homeland Security, is working hand-in-hand with our friends in the Mexican government to develop investigations and prosecutions to combat human trafficking rings operating on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

These efforts are a true testament to what the U.S. government can achieve when we collaborate and share resources, and the Criminal Division is absolutely committed to working with its law enforcement partners even more closely in the future.

Today's celebration marks the anniversary of a tremendously important piece of legislation that continues to aid us in our fight against human trafficking. I am privileged to take part in this event with you. Thank you. Now please welcome your next speaker, the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio, Steve Dettelbach.