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Preview to Annual Meeting of the President's Interagency Task Force To Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons

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Luis CdeBaca

Director, Office To Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons

Washington, DC

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MR. TONER: Good afternoon. Today, Secretary Clinton will chair the President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. She'll be joined by fellow cabinet members as well as other task force representatives. This meeting, which is required under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, is the first under this Administration and will discuss steps taken by our interagency partners in the last year as well as map out coordinated strategies across the Obama Administration to confront modern slavery.

Ambassador-at-Large Luis CdeBaca, the Director of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, is here to provide a preview of that meeting. Ambassador CdeBaca serves as the chair of the Senior Policy Operating Group, which oversees the day-to-day implementation and coordination of the Administration's interagency trafficking – anti-trafficking policies.

Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: Thank you. As Mark said, I'm Luis CdeBaca. I'm the Ambassador-at-Large for the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking. Today, Secretary Clinton will chair the President's interagency task force. She'll be joined by other members of the task force, including the Attorney General, the secretaries of Labor, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services; the USAID Administrator, the Director of National Intelligence, as well as representatives from the White House, Department of Defense, Education, Agriculture, and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

This meeting, which, as Mark said, is mandated under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, is the first held under the Obama Administration. In today's meeting, we will look forward to a very candid and progressive discussion that highlights the work that each agency is conducting individually as well as collectively to combat modern slavery. In addition, it's a chance to preview the anti-trafficking efforts in the days, weeks, and months ahead as we work together to make measured progress against every form of exploitation, including forced labor, peonage, and sexual servitude, in response to the President's declaration of January as Human Trafficking and Slavery Awareness and Prevention Month.

To put this issue into broader context, the crime problem of human trafficking has crosscutting implications across U.S. Government policy lines, and that's quite evident by the participation of the stakeholders who we will see today. Just one example of how coordination works in the real world and how human trafficking affects American communities: Yesterday afternoon, a jury in Dallas-Fort Worth convicted two defendants of enslaving a woman as their domestic servant in a scheme that lasted almost a decade. To bring these perpetrators to justice and to make sure that their victim was safe and cared for took the efforts of many different agencies working in concert. Just as we worked to rescue one individual Nigerian woman from servitude in Texas, we have to combine our individual mandates and skill sets in a manner that enables a whole-of-government response equal to the scale of this problem. Because to confront modern slavery, we must act in a manner commensurate to the sophistication and tenacity of our adversaries, the traffickers, while honoring the bravery and humanity of the victims.

ALLA InfoNet Doc. No. 10020578. (Posted 02/05/10)

With that, I will answer any questions you might have.

QUESTION: How pervasive would you say the problem of human trafficking is worldwide?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: There are a number of different estimates and it's a pretty broad estimate, depending on the methodology. The International Labor Organization estimates that there are around 12.3 million persons laboring in bondage around the world. And some of the other estimates from other organizations are higher, up to 27 million. Some of it ends up, again, coming down to methodology. But certainly, 12.3 million is – we think that that's a pretty accurate number.

QUESTION: And what are the demographics?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: According to the ILO, it's around – and I apologize if I don't have the exact number. We can get that for you. But according to the ILO, I want to say it's around 50 to 60 percent female, that by their numbers, it's somewhere around 9 to 10 million in forced labor situations and 2 to 3 million in sex trafficking situations.

QUESTION: The impression we sometimes get is that this is carried out by organized crime groups. Can you set us straight on who exactly is doing this? Is there an international worldwide network of people? What's the homegrown part of it?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: Exactly. We've seen all of these different manifestations, and I think this is one of the challenges of this crime, is that for every case that you have like the one in Dallas yesterday, where a man and a woman acted upon their own to bring a servant from their home country and enslave her in their house, you also have cases such as a case that I prosecuted when I was in the Civil Rights Division, for instance, in Michigan and another one in Illinois, in which you had more traditional Russian organized crime types of figures who were recruiting people in Ukraine, in Lithuania, Latvia, et cetera, bringing them over as something that would be, I guess for lack of a better word, the stereotypical type of case that you describe. And so as a result, you end up having to have a response that finds those individual actors and at the same time is able to go after the cartels.

One of the things that we've been very successful in doing in the past year during the Obama Administration is working with the Government of Mexico so that, for the first time now, we have cases that are being investigated and prosecuted both at the beginning of the case in Mexico and in the United States, the first case recently that was brought kind of simultaneously in Atlanta and in the state of Tlaxcala in Mexico. We think that that's probably the way to go when you're dealing with these – more of the international crime rings is to do that simultaneously in both countries.

QUESTION: So where are these people taken? I have an image of a map around the world. Where do they come from? Where do they go?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: A lot of the cases are actually people who are enslaved in their own country. And it – I don't think we have good data as to whether that's the norm or whether transnational movement for the purposes of exploitation is the norm. Certainly, again, the conception that I think a lot of people have on this is that this is a phenomenon of movement and migration which is not required by the United Nations protocol, it's not required by U.S. law.

Basically, what we see though is trafficking flows – when it is a movement crime, trafficking flows mimicking the broader migration flow. So, for instance, if you look in Western Europe, traditionally a lot of the people who have been held in servitude have been from Eastern Europe, but now they're starting to see a number of cases involving Chinese children and other Asian folks brought in – again, not always for sex, but sometimes for forced labor, starting to get begging rings with kids from Africa and things like that in a number of European cities. And that really is following the broader migrant flow, so it should be no surprise to people that here in the United States, a lot of our cases involve people from Mexico and Latin America because just, again, the basic percentage of migrants in this country is predominantly Hispanic.

QUESTION: Is this simply taking advantage of people who are in dire economic straits, or do you see an uptick when there is some sort of natural crisis such as an earthquake, a tsunami, something of that sort?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: I think that part of what we've seen is that the traffickers end up taking advantage of whatever vulnerability is in front of them. So, for instance, there was a case that was prosecuted a couple of years ago in Kansas where the victims were white American citizens but who were made vulnerable to enslavement because of mental illness, schizophrenia, et cetera.

Usually, the vulnerabilities come from race, class, migratory status, unfamiliarity with the language or the culture. And certainly, we see this notion of displacement, whether it's in conflict areas, the women and children enslaved in the Eastern Congo and in other places in Africa to do what's called euphemistically artisanal mining, scratching the precious minerals from the earth that can then be used in our cell phones and other things like that, tantalum and cobalt, but also the notion of the predators coming in to – whether it's refugee camps, whether it's into other places where we've seen that kind of displacement.

And just as we've seen the refugee camps, the TIP is a tool used to monitor and track human trafficking in the world. (Posted 02/05/10)

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becoming a place where human traffickers go to try to find their victims, obviously, that's something that we're looking at in the last three weeks in the wake of the earthquake in Haiti.

QUESTION: Can you explain --

QUESTION: Can you be more specific about Haiti and whether you -- what you've seen and whether you're just worried about it in general or whether you're actually seeing it, and are there any cases aside from the dozen Americans in the case that's pending down there?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: Well, I won't address the dozen -- the Americans in the case that's pending. I think that you've heard about that from the podium through some other folks. But the -- we are hearing anecdotal evidence from certainly, obviously, UNICEF, which is the head of the child cluster there in Haiti, and other NGOs about the notion of recruiters or others in some of these camps. I think that some of that's been reported.

QUESTION: What was the name of that organization? UNIT?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: UNICEF?

QUESTION: Oh, from UNICEF. Okay.

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: Yeah. But some of the other organizations that are there. We have begun to -- we've actually got funding out the door already to a group called Heartland Alliance that's part of the child cluster that's one of the more experienced U.S. countertrafficking organizations. They work with a lot of the trafficking victims in the Midwest. They're out of Chicago. But they also do countertrafficking projects for -- with grant money from us around the world. And they're stepping up their activities in Haiti.

One of the things that we're responding to is not necessarily that there is one particular case that's triggered this or one particular allegation that's triggered this, but rather the notion that when you have a refugee situation or you have a natural disaster, et cetera, especially in the 10 years now since the adoption of the United Nations Protocol Against Trafficking in Persons, there's a recognition that you have to build that into your response, just like you'd build -- if you were going to have a major sporting event, you'd have to build in how many ambulances do you need if somebody's going to have heart attacks, what do you do about terrorism.

I think now we're starting to see that countertrafficking responses need to be built in from the beginning, and especially in a place like Haiti, where, as our report in 2009 pointed out, there was a large child trafficking problem before the earthquake hit. And so I think that the unique situation that we have with Haiti means that it's even more pressing on the part of donor communities and governments like the United States, who are working on the ground there.

QUESTION: Do you have any statistics on how many -- on the problem in Haiti before the earthquake, numbers? And then also on that whole total of 12.3 million persons, how many of those were children, roughly?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: We'll have to, I think, circle back with you on the ILO study. The ILO study, just so you have it, the name of that was called the Cost of Coercion. And I --

QUESTION: The what?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: The Cost of Coercion -- in which the ILO not only did a snapshot of the problem in the world but also did some economic modeling in which they're estimating that it's about 31 billion profit to the traffickers annually, and about 20 billion opportunity cost losses to the victims on top of that, so it's about a 50 billion industry worldwide.

As far as Haiti is concerned, last year in the annual Trafficking in Persons Report, Haiti -- and again, this is a wide range of estimate -- the high-end estimate is 300,000 children who are in the restavek system in Haiti, with an additional potential of 3,000 who may have been taken to the Dominican Republic for use.

And the restavek system, for those of you who are unfamiliar with that, it's a -- basically a system of fostering out children who then are working as child domestic servants, often abused, often exploited. They tend to age out because the Haitian law requires employers to pay domestic workers over the age of 15. And so one of the things that we're concerned about and that we raised in the report last year was the notion that many of the street children -- whether it's girls in prostitution, whether it's boys engaged in crime, et cetera -- are basically restaveks who were disposed of by the families who had had them before. So that's that that notion of kind of the child domestic servant, often enslaved, usually given to the person because of promises that the child would be cared for, sent to school, et cetera. So that's one of the things that we are very concerned about is that as we rebuild, as we start to enter the rebuilding stage, that the child safety response is in place so that we don't see an even bigger increase in that restavek population.

QUESTION: Last year's report refers to --

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: I promised him that I would come to him.

QUESTION: You've got a specific question on Haiti?

AIILA InfoNet Doc. No. 10020578. (Posted 02/05/10)

QUESTION: No, go ahead and, I'll come back to that.

QUESTION: Those figures are from 2008, though, right?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: Yes, and the 2009 numbers actually should be coming in. We've -- we're in the middle of our reporting period right now, so we're looking for our reporting cables. Obviously, we're going to have to see how much of the data is going to be collectible in Haiti right now, given what's going on with the government and its ability to give us any kind of data on this.

QUESTION: Just two things. One, you said that you're hearing anecdotally about the notion of traffickers in Haiti. What do you mean by "about the notion of"? I mean, are you hearing anecdotes that there are actually traffickers or --

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: For -- just one for instance. There's been reports, that I think have been reported on in the news as well, of men coming into some of the camps, using offers of food or water to get girls to leave with them in trucks. Now, obviously, we don't have any hard evidence as to what's happening to those girls once they leave with those men, and so that's why the term "the notion of" trafficking.

When we look at human trafficking, as far as what the crime phenomenon would be, we're looking at somebody who's being held in compelled service. So we can suspect that that may have been the case that they might have been recruiting those girls for prostitution and that, because they're under age, could be a trafficking situation, but we don't have the hard information yet as to what's happening down the road. And I think that's one of the things that we're going to be looking to work with the Haitian police as they, again, move out of the immediate disaster response and go back to reconstruction and governance. We'll be wanting to work with them as far as how do you set up detective squads and child protective folks that can then go and look downstream as far as that's --

QUESTION: That was exactly my next question, which is: Can you describe for us, other than detective squads, what are the kinds of specific, practical steps that one should set up? The same way that you try to estimate how many ambulances you need for a sporting event, what are the kinds of things you need to put in place in this kind of a -- after such a natural disaster or a war or whatever?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: Well, before the earthquake, we had about \$500,000 worth of programming in Haiti itself, and those were largely about child trafficking. It was a couple of projects that were working with protecting escaped restaveks and seeking reintegration, either back with their families or with families who could foster them, who wouldn't abuse them, to improve and instill greater public awareness about human trafficking within Haiti.

So it was something that then you'd see legal reforms or bigger resources being put into it by the government, and also to provide direct services to victims, whether it's men, women or children, in Haiti.

We also have some projects in the Dominican Republic, who are working with the Haitian community there, some of whom are in exploitative conditions, whether it's in farming or whether it's in the sex industry. And so there's a project that we're working on with the Solidarity Center, working on how to get information out to those communities.

What we've done in the last three weeks is we've repositioned a number of those projects. In the Dominican Republic, for instance, we're working with the Solidarity Center so that we can try to turn that project around a little bit and have it catch, if there are folks that are coming over the border in search of jobs, in search of work, that they know their rights, that they know that they shouldn't put themselves into a situation where they can be exploited.

So we're working on the Dominican side with that project, and then we're also moving money into Haiti as far as trying to build up those child protection brigades, as far as working with the groups such as the Jean Robert Cadet Restavek Foundation and others to try to make sure that we can have some things in place to protect those children.

But I think that what we see as far as the bigger macro issue is that it's -- the response to human trafficking is not the first week or two's response; that's the immediate shelter needs, immediate medical needs, et cetera. Then it's starting to overlay in, do you have protection, do you have police, do you have social workers, et cetera, and that's where we're trying to move with this.

QUESTION: And how are the child protection brigades different from police or social workers? I mean, what are they?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: They're a little more akin to the folks here in the United States who are the child protective services --

QUESTION: Okay.

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: -- folks, so it's kind of half police, half social worker in the best of all possible worlds. And that's what we're going to be engaging with the Haitian Government on as to what's their vision that we can come in, supplement that, professionalize it, and make sure that there are enough folks in the child protection brigades to actually go out now that we've got so many children who will need to be reunited either with their families or with the orphanages that they were in before, et cetera.

QUESTION: Can you explain exactly what this meeting is today about -- this afternoon? I mean, you made reference several times to the fact that it's mandated. I mean, is there any reason other than the fact that it's mandated that it's

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happening today? Is there anything to announce coming out of it? Is there any new strategy, any new policy that's going to arise? Or is this just kind of a get-together and look at what we've done over the past year?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: I think what we'll see out of this is we'll see – there's a little bit of bringing everyone together, which is what Congress set up the task force to do. But I think that one of the things that we'll see is a commitment from the cabinet to actually go out and then implement what the President called for in his declaration on January 4th.

QUESTION: Well, wasn't there already that commitment?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: Well, that commitment was there, but as far as the task force officially declaring it moving forward, what comes out of today will actually, I think, give us a roadmap that we can use for the interagency coordination through the President's Interagency Task Force and the senior policy operating group. And so --

QUESTION: But wasn't that being done last year as well?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: It was being done last year, but --

QUESTION: Okay. So what's different? I guess I'm just trying to figure out what the point of this meeting is. I mean, it sounds as though it's just kind of a review and like, yay, let's everyone get onboard, but not much substance.

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: Well, I think that what we're seeing is that the way that Congress set the task force up was that the task force has a coordinating function through the senior policy operating group – and that meets quarterly – that's where we look at the particular substance, we feed that up to our principals, decisions can be made. Today is the principals meeting, so it'll be giving us the marching orders for what we do at the more substantive level going throughout the next year.

QUESTION: You asking for more money for Haiti? You said that previously you had about \$500,000 a year in projects. And I know you guys have – don't have yet an exact sum for assistance for Haiti. But do you plan to ask for additional money to combat these kinds of – to combat trafficking in Haiti?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: Well, we have 500,000 to begin with. We will reposition about another a million, taking that from other projects, frankly. And so we need to look at how we make sure that those projects, which – the money of which hasn't gone out the door yet. And those countries don't necessarily (inaudible) or not, now that we're looking at the Haitian side.

Obviously, we're looking at what the long-term funding needs are. We have about \$20-, \$22 million in grant funds that we administer in the Trafficking office. We work with our partners at USAID and at the International Labor Affairs Bureau over at DOL, and we are shaking the trees right now to figure out what money there is in this year's budget, as opposed to looking into the next year.

QUESTION: Right.

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: I know that Deputy Secretary Lew was in talking budget issues with you guys earlier this week. Right now, we're shaking the 2010 trees to try to figure out what monies we have available right now. And as we do that, obviously, we'll be looking at the budget needs going forward.

QUESTION: And the additional 1 million that's been repositioned is all FY2010 money, correct?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: I want to say it's – there might be a little bit of unspent 20 – 2009 money --

QUESTION: Okay.

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: -- that hasn't gone out the door yet --

QUESTION: Okay.

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: -- but it's not new money --

QUESTION: Right.

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: -- from a new place yet.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: One more question on funding. The people from – who are going to be working with Haiti or with any country on these projects, are they U.S. Government employees or are they NGOs who have applied for grant money from the federal government? What's the breakdown on that?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: I don't think we have a particular ratio yet. At this point, the folks that were on the ground were the grantees, and so we're looking to try to intensify that so that they can get into action immediately.

QUESTION: Okay.

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AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: Many of them started working first and then we've been trying to overlay it so they can actually start bringing in some experts – not only American experts, but also there are a lot of Haitian experts, people on the ground, who can be brought into this, I think especially as people continue to dig out. And so we want to make sure that the – that our partners on the ground there have the funding, everything from rebuilding and making sure that there's enough food and water for the kids, to if they need to be hiring more social workers or other things so that they can go ahead and do that.

QUESTION: Just one last question?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: One last question.

QUESTION: Okay. Just on statistics here, the number of people who are laboring in bondage, do you have any figures for the United States?

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: The United States numbers are very imprecise, and I don't think that we're in a position where we can really give you a number. There's been numbers recorded in the past. We're looking at their methodology on that. I think that the consensus out in the anti-trafficking community is that certainly, we're talking about tens of thousands. The number of trafficking victims that have been found in the United States don't come anywhere near that, and that's one of the things that we're going to be talking about today with the fellow cabinet members, is how we can ensure that we're finding and protecting as many of those victims as possible.

I think one of the ways that we do that, frankly, is that we're now starting to see state laws come on line. And as we get state and local law enforcement – not just federal law enforcement – we'll hopefully be seeing more rescues.

QUESTION: Thank you.

AMBASSADOR CDEBACA: Thank you.

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