



International Human Trafficking and Forced Labor

Testimony

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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for the invitation to testify today. I also want to thank the Commission for its continued leadership in the U.S. Government's efforts to combat modern day slavery, and in particular for shining a light on the problem of human trafficking for forced labor as a human rights violation.

We remember the man whose life and work inspired this commission, Congressman Lantos, who worked tirelessly on behalf of millions of victims who suffered greatly or whose lives were lost as a result of forced labor. It's in their memory that we approach the issue of forced labor not just as a regulatory violation or a crime, but as an assault on our most basic human rights. In that spirit, it's an honor to work with this commission to carry on Tom Lantos's work of advancing human rights around the world.

And let me say more generally what a pleasure it has been over the last four years advancing our work on trafficking issues with colleagues across government, whether counterparts at partner agencies or supporters of our efforts on Capitol Hill. Since the start of the modern anti-trafficking movement more than a decade ago, this is an issue that has consistently boasted bipartisan support. And I'm happy to say that we've built on that tradition in recent years.

For example, we see that this issue continues to garner focus from the highest levels of Government. Just as President Clinton made his mark by signing the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, and just as President Bush carried that momentum forward, President Obama has made the fight against human trafficking a priority for his White House. As we heard in his speech at the Clinton Global Initiative Meeting in September, this President is committed to the fight against modern slavery, whether trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation or, as we're discussing today, forced labor.

So what are we doing about it?

Well, we're pressing ahead with the practices that have shown the best results. We're ramping up victim identification efforts and prosecuting more traffickers. We're providing services to survivors and working to train law enforcement and justice officials around the world. We're keeping track of this problem—and how well governments are fighting it—through our annual *Trafficking in Persons Report*.

The State Department has worked with partner agencies to make sure people who travel to this country on non-immigrant visas are aware of their rights. We've made our reporting standards sharper and more specific. We've enhanced protections for immigrant victims who are resettled in their home countries. Our partner agencies have established programs for unaccompanied alien children, implemented new family unification measures, and are incorporating trafficking offenses into the unified Crime Reporting Statistics.

This is a record of which we should all be proud.

But when we look at the scale of the problem—the ILO tells us that around the world 21 million people are victims of forced labor—we realize that the future of this struggle will depend on new innovations and fresh approaches.

So we're also focused on developing those new ideas for dealing with this crime. We're addressing a culture that acts as if modern slavery is someone else's problem and we're confronting the mentality that the low cost of a product came at no cost to the worker.

When it comes to forced labor, we're taking a hard look at the supply chains and labor sources behind the products we use every day. And what we've found should make us all think about the way this crime affects our lives. Because it's likely that many of the products we use and rely on every day—from our morning coffee to our cotton sheets to the smart phone in our pocket to the car we drive to work—were touched by forced labor somewhere along the line.

We need to keep prosecuting traffickers and protecting their victims, but if that's all we're doing, it means we're cleaning up the mess after the abuse and exploitation occurs.

Stopping this problem in the supply chain will require greater awareness by consumers and new partnerships with the private sector—corporate leaders committed to making sure their goods and services are free from exploitation.

So we've brought potential partners to the table. We've made the case that fighting slavery is good business—after all, Harvard Business School showed us that American consumers are often willing to pay a price premium if they know what they're buying hasn't been tainted by modern slavery. And we're helping develop codes of conduct and monitoring standards that will allow businesses to make the fight against slavery a part of their corporate policies.

But as important as it is to support these new innovations, we're going further. We also believe that we need to lead by example. The U.S. Government is one of the largest purchasers in the world, and if we're going to tell companies that they should crack down on modern slavery, we're going to have to hold ourselves to the same standard. That's why the President signed an executive order earlier this year that provides more extensive prohibitions and protections for United States government purchases—to make sure American tax dollars are not being used to support human trafficking.

This action sends a clear message about how seriously this Administration takes this problem. It also tells companies, "If you want to do business with the U.S. Government, modern slavery is a problem you need to confront as well."

These are important steps. But they're only a start. If we continue to support this effort with the support and resources it needs, we will be able to enlist more partners in this struggle, develop new tools for fighting this crime, and move us closer to a world free from slavery.

And this is an issue that deserves no less than our full commitment. As the President said in September, "Our fight against human trafficking is one of the great human rights causes of our time, and the United States will continue to lead it."

Thank you again for your invitation to testify today, and thank you for your partnership in this important fight.