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JUSTICE NEWS

Acting Associate Attorney General Tony West Speaks at the Anti-Human Trafficking Symposium: Transforming the Coalition

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Thank you, Sean, for that kind introduction and for inviting me to participate in today's important event during National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month. I am honored to join Director Morton and the other distinguished speakers you will hear today. I would especially like to acknowledge my Justice colleagues who will be speaking on this panel – Karima Maloney, who serves as a Deputy Chief in the Civil Rights Division, and FBI Supervisory Special Agent Dave Rogers.

Events like today's symposium are essential for facilitating the critical cross-sector synergies needed to combat human trafficking through prevention, enforcement, and victim services. As the Acting Associate Attorney General, the third-ranking official at the Department of Justice, I am responsible for overseeing components that have a role in each of these areas by prosecuting human trafficking cases, providing victim services, funding human trafficking research, and training of law enforcement and communities to identify and rescue trafficked persons.

Last September, the President declared our fight against human trafficking to be one of the great human rights causes of our time. It's been more than a century-and-a-half since our Nation was divided half slave and half free; since opposing armies met in battle on American soil to end that division; and since President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. And yet, that history notwithstanding, we know that modern-day slavery persists. We know that around the world, millions still live in bondage. We know that trafficked persons are subject to the most brutal physical violence—including brandings and horrific beatings—and that bondage does not always come in the form of physical chains; that modern-day slavery can occur in plain sight, involving more subtle methods of coercion in the form of false promises, isolation, surveillance, threats of deportation or arrest, or economic dependence.

These subtleties and other complex factors present unique challenges for law enforcement and victim service providers, but the Department of Justice and our local, state and federal partners – including the Departments of Homeland Security, Labor, Health and Human Services, and State – are aggressively combating human trafficking and ensuring that victims are treated as victims and receive the services they need.

Indeed, this Administration has promoted interagency collaborations to combat human trafficking like no other. At the Department of Justice, our Civil Rights Division through its Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit; our Criminal Division through its Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section; and our U.S. Attorney's Offices across the country are working with investigators at the FBI and DHS's Immigration and Customs Enforcement, as well as partners at the Departments of Labor and State, to prosecute a record number of human trafficking cases. From 2009 through 2012, the Justice Department brought over 200 human trafficking cases, which is an increase of over 39% from the prior four-year period.

And these prosecutions are yielding sentences that send an unequivocal message that human trafficking perpetrators who prey on the most vulnerable among us will be identified, pursued, and brought to justice.

Our efforts mean that a trafficker who exploited young girls, many of them runaways, to engage in prostitution out of his Florida residence will spend the rest of his life behind bars. They mean that a woman who targeted poor, young, and uneducated women and girls with promises of legitimate employment in Guam but, instead, forced them into prostitution by confiscating their identification documents and threatening arrest, will spend the rest of her life in prison. They mean that a sex trafficker who forced young women in Atlanta into prostitution by beating them, raping them, and plying them with cocaine, will also spend the rest of his life in prison.

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A few months ago, a man who called himself “Cowboy” learned that he, too, would spend the rest of his life in prison for various crimes related to coercing foreign women into forced labor and commercial sex. He lured women with false promises of legitimate employment, a place to live, assistance with immigration, and romance. Once he gained their trust, he branded the victims with horseshoe tattoos, which he said made them his property and allowed him to stop paying them. He confiscated the women’s passports and visas; he forced them to work long hours every day; he beat them if they disobeyed.

But in remarkable acts of courage, a few of these women spoke out. Four of the victims came forward, worked with law enforcement and community groups, and testified about their exploitation, helping to end their nightmare and save other young women from the same fate.

And while sex-trafficked women and girls are the faces of human trafficking we most often see, let’s not forget that millions of people are also trafficked into forced labor or domestic servitude. Just last week, a federal court in Pennsylvania unsealed a 193-count indictment charging several defendants with forced labor and other crimes—even murder—for engaging in a racketeering enterprise that involved targeting victims with mental disabilities and subjecting them to subhuman conditions of captivity – including keeping the victims locked in closets and attics, depriving them of food and medical care, and beating them with bats and hammers.

Over the past four years, the number of labor trafficking cases brought by the Department of Justice has more than doubled, thanks in large part to greater interagency cooperation – because a threat to human rights of this magnitude demands coordination on a grand scale. We have enhanced our partnerships with the Departments of Labor and Homeland Security, collaborating with them through the Federal Enforcement Working Group to bring joint investigations through our pilot Anti-Trafficking Coordination Teams – or “ACTeams” – Initiative. Through these partnerships, we have initiated complex, multi-jurisdictional, and international labor trafficking investigations; we successfully prosecuted domestic servitude

cases in jurisdictions where they had never been federally prosecuted before; we secured the longest sentence ever imposed in a forced labor case.

Because human trafficking knows no borders, our efforts to fight it must also have an international reach. So, in collaboration with DHS and our Mexican law enforcement counterparts, we are transcending borders through the U.S.-Mexico Human Trafficking Bilateral Enforcement Initiative. Through this initiative, we have developed high-impact bilateral investigations and prosecutions aimed at dismantling international human trafficking networks. The result has been landmark convictions in coordinated prosecutions under both U.S. and Mexican law.

Just last month, as a result of this successful coordination, a trafficking victim whose child was taken from her by the trafficker when the child was an infant was reunited with her now-teenage daughter. The child had been fathered by the trafficker, a man who was convicted in the Eastern District of New York in 2005 of multiple counts of sex trafficking and other crimes. Prior to the reunification, the child had been held in Mexico by members of the trafficking organization. Such an extraordinary reunification underscores that our work in this area doesn’t end with an arrest, a conviction, or even a long sentence. Our responsibility extends to helping the victims of trafficking recover and rebuild their lives, and move from being victims to and becoming survivors. At the Department of Justice, our Office of Justice Programs through the Office for Victims of Crime and Bureau of Justice Assistance is leading our efforts to train law enforcement and communities to identifying, rescuing, and providing comprehensive services to victims of trafficking. In 2012, the Department provided over \$5.3 million to nongovernmental organizations to provide trafficking victims with comprehensive legal services; basic needs for shelter, food, and clothing; medical and mental health treatment; job skills training; and transportation. An additional \$3.5 million supported seven local law enforcement agencies that coordinated with a victim service provider partner and its local U.S. Attorney’s Office to form a multidisciplinary anti-human trafficking task force designed to promote collaboration among state and local law enforcement, trafficking victim service providers, and federal law enforcement.

And at the President’s urging, to better leverage our federal resources on behalf of victims, the Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services, and Homeland Security are drafting the first ever federal victim services strategic action plan – a plan that will create a victims services network that gives all identified victims of human trafficking access to the full array of comprehensive services to aid them on the road to recovery.

Efforts such as these—collaborations, partnerships—these are critical to our fight against modern day slavery; they’re crucial to our success in stamping out an abhorrent practice that strikes at the heart of our most fundamental notions of human dignity and human decency. The federal government—both within and across agencies—will continue to strengthen our unified response to human trafficking, but as the Attorney General acknowledged last April in Little Rock, we will never be able to make the progress we need on our own.



We need the continued partnerships of foreign, state, local, and tribal officials. We need the leadership of the business community and the innovation of researchers and academics; and we need the voices of victim advocates and the resolve of victim service providers.

Because whether they live in the shadows or in plain sight; in chains of metal or in chains of manipulation; as documented citizens or undocumented immigrants – the victims of human

trafficking live among us; work among us; walk among us; and we must not waver in our resolve to end their suffering.

Thank you.

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