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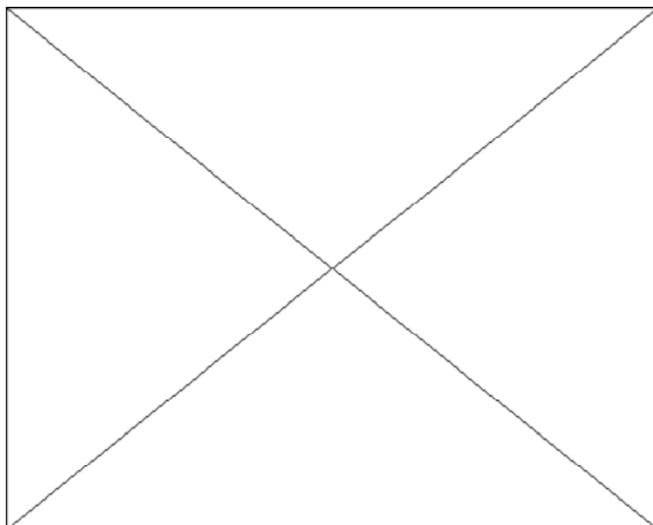
NOVEMBER 2, 2009 WASHINGTON, DC

ICE gives voice to victims of human trafficking in the United States "Hidden in plain sight" theme shines a light on the problem of thousands estimated being held as modern-day slaves in the U.S.

WASHINGTON - U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has a media initiative to inform the public about the horrors and the prevalence of human trafficking, which is modern-day slavery.

As part of ICE's continued efforts, the agency has unveiled an outdoor public service announcement campaign, "Hidden in Plain Sight," to draw the American public's attention to the plight of human-trafficking victims in the United States. The campaign message explains that human trafficking includes those who are sexually exploited or forced to work against their will.

Posters, billboards and transit shelter signs were rolled out last month bearing the slogan "Hidden in Plain Sight." They are displayed in Atlanta, Boston, Dallas, Detroit, Los Angeles, Miami, Philadelphia, Newark, New Orleans, New York, St Paul, San Antonio, San Francisco and Tampa. The campaign's goal is to raise public awareness about the existence of human trafficking in communities nationwide, and asks members of the public to take action if they encounter possible victims.



By going directly to the American public, ICE is hoping to root out the criminals associated with human trafficking. As the largest investigative agency in the Department of Homeland Security, ICE is poised to target individuals and companies suspected of using people as modern-day slaves.

"Most Americans would be shocked to learn that slavery still exists in this day and age in communities throughout the country," said John Morton, assistant secretary of Homeland Security for ICE. "Because this heinous crime is extremely well-hidden, we need to help educate members of the public about human trafficking, and encourage them to keep alert for possible human trafficking victims."

It is estimated that 800,000 men, women and children are trafficked around the world each year. These victims are trafficked into the commercial sex trade, and into forced-labor situations. Many of these victims are lured from their homes with false promises of well-paying jobs; instead, they are forced or coerced into prostitution, domestic servitude, farm or factory labor, or other types of forced labor.

The greatest challenge in combating human trafficking is victim identification. Surprisingly, many people are unaware that this form of modern-day slavery occurs every day in the United States. These victims may end up in a foreign country. They are often unable to speak the language and have no one to advocate for them. Traffickers often take away the victims' travel and identity documents. They tell their victims that if they attempt to escape, their families back home will be either physically or financially harmed.

ICE is asking for the public's help to remain alert to recognize and identify victims of modern-day slavery who are in our midst. They are domestic servants, sweat-shop employees, sex workers and fruit pickers who were lured here by the promise of prosperity. Ultimately, they are forced to work without pay and are unable to leave their situation. ICE is committed to giving them the help they need to come forward and help us end human trafficking with vigorous enforcement and tough penalties. As a primary mission area, ICE has the overall goal of preventing human trafficking in the United States by prosecuting the traffickers, and rescuing and protecting the victims.

One example that demonstrates the horrors of human trafficking is regarding a family of four in Newark, N.J. Lassissi Afolabi, Akouavi Kpade Afolabi, Derek Hounakey and Geoffrey Kouevi were all indicted in the District of New Jersey on numerous charges, including: visa fraud, forced labor, trafficking, transportation of a minor across state lines with intent to engage in criminal sexual activity, smuggling and harboring aliens for commercial advantage and financial gain.

Their scheme involved smuggling young African women into the United States under assumed identities, and forcing them to work in hair-braiding salons in the Newark, N.J., area. The women worked six to seven days a week, eight to 12 hours per day. They were not allowed to keep the money they earned. Some of the victims were also subjected to physical and sexual abuse, and

were held in servitude for more than five years. Ultimately, all the defendants were convicted or pleaded guilty to the charges and are awaiting sentencing.

In Atlanta, Ga., Amador Cortes-Meza, Francisco Cortes-Meza, Raul Cortes-Meza, Juan Cortes-Meza and Edison Wagner Rosa-Tort were indicted for adult and child sex trafficking. They physically abused young women and girls, some of whom were as young as 14 years of age. The victims were held against their will, and forced into prostitution. To force them to work as prostitutes in the Atlanta area, some of the victims were beaten, threatened, or their families in Mexico were threatened.

At least one of the co-defendants was always present in the home where the women lived to monitor them and direct the prostitution work. None of the victims were allowed to leave the house unaccompanied. The victims often had to service 20 to 30 men each night. Some of the \$25 prostitution charge went to the drivers who transported the young women to the "johns." However, the majority of the money was kept by the traffickers. Earlier this year, four of the six defendants pleaded guilty to sex trafficking, which carries a minimum 10-year sentence; another pleaded guilty to a lesser charge. The last defendant is pending judicial action. All other defendants are pending sentencing.

Anyone who knows or suspects that someone is being forced to work against their will should contact the ICE tip line anonymously at 866-DHS-2-ICE. You can also view or download the video Public Service Announcement at www.ice.gov (<http://www.ice.gov/human-trafficking/>).

You may also visit us on Facebook (<http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://www.facebook.com/wwicegov>), Twitter (<http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://twitter.com/wwicegov>) and YouTube (<http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://www.youtube.com/wwicegov>).

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.

ICE is a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities. For more information, visit www.ICE.gov. To report suspicious activity, call 1-866-347-2423 or complete our [tip form](http://www.ice.gov/tips/) (<http://www.ice.gov/tips/>).