

Statement of
The Honorable John Cornyn

United States Senator
Texas
July 7, 2004

Examining U.S. Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking and Slavery

This subcommittee is expressly chartered to oversee constitutional and civil rights issues across America. Just last month, the subcommittee examined the pervasive problem of hostility to religious expression in public squares across America.

Today's hearing will look at the most fundamental of all of our cherished civil rights. Today, the subcommittee will examine U.S. efforts to combat human trafficking and slavery across America.

As the Administration continues to fight to protect the American way of life in its war against terrorism, it has also been fighting another war to protect American ideals and principles - a war against an old evil: human trafficking and slavery.

Most Americans would be shocked to learn that the institutions of slavery and involuntary servitude - institutions that this nation fought a bloody war to destroy - continue to persist today - not just around the world, but hidden in communities across America.

It has been nearly two centuries since the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, and well over a century since the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment. Yet to this day, men, women and children continue to be trafficked into the United States, and coerced into lives of forced labor and sexual slavery. The stories they tell are tragic, disturbing, and heart-rending. And the acts they endure are not just unconstitutional, not just criminal - they are profoundly evil, immoral, and wrong.

Today, we will hear tales of human suffering - from across Texas, and across America. Their experiences amount to a modern-day form of slavery. Their stories are not easy to hear - but we must hear them and we must face up to them, if we are to finish the work of the Thirteenth Amendment, and truly expel the institution of slavery from our midst. We will hear their stories, and then we will learn what the Administration has been doing to alleviate this suffering. Specifically, we will examine the Justice Department's efforts to protect the victims of human trafficking and slavery, to punish the evildoers, and to prevent other innocent human beings from ever having to suffer the same fate.

On March 27, 2001 - within weeks of taking office - Attorney General John Ashcroft announced the creation of a comprehensive Justice Department initiative to combat human trafficking in America. Since that announcement, the Department has undertaken an aggressive campaign to eradicate slavery in America - an effort led by the Civil Rights Division, and joined by other components within Main Justice, as well as U.S. Attorney offices across the country.

The Thirteenth Amendment states, and I quote: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude . . . shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." This is a unique provision of our Constitution. Many constitutional amendments protect individual rights against actions by federal, state, and local governments. Other amendments alter the structure of our government. But the Thirteenth Amendment is different. It protects fundamental human rights by abolishing an entire institution of society. The Thirteenth Amendment is unique, because under it, slavery and involuntary servitude cannot exist - in public and private spheres alike.

Yet the institution of slavery continues to exist, even today. In communities across America, human beings are trafficked - literally bought and sold - into lives of forced labor or sex slavery.

The trafficking of human beings is evil, immoral, and wrong - yet most Americans are unaware even of its existence, let alone its magnitude. According to government estimates, approximately 800,000 human beings are bought, sold or forced across the world's borders each year. Moreover, Americans may be particularly alarmed to learn that at least 15,000 human beings are trafficked into lives of slavery in the United States each year. Indeed, according to some estimates, the number could be as high as 50,000 per year.

We cannot grasp the true, horrifying nature of human trafficking and slavery with numbers alone, however. We must not simply count the victims - we must also hear their stories.

Just recently, the Justice Department obtained convictions in the largest labor trafficking case it has ever prosecuted [*United States v. Kil Soo Lee*]. Kil Soo Lee, a Korean businessman, transported over 200 workers from China and Vietnam into United States territory. He detained them and forced them to work in his American Samoa garment factory under slave-like conditions, enforcing his will by ordering beatings by his henchmen - using sharpened pipes, fluorescent lights, chairs, and fists. Civil Rights Division attorneys successfully prosecuted Mr. Lee and his partners under the federal criminal slavery and peonage statutes. Mr. Lee's sentencing is pending, and two of his thugs are already serving substantial time.

Consider another tragic example, this one from my home state of Texas. An international trafficking operation - known by local prosecutors as the "Molina Organization" - promised young females a better life and employment in the United States, as either housekeepers or waitresses in restaurants throughout the Ft. Worth area. Once they arrived, however, they were coerced into lives of prostitution and forced labor. Over 200 young women were trafficked from Honduras into the United States by this operation. The U.S. Attorney's office in the Northern District of Texas, working in conjunction with the Civil Rights Division, shut down the operation by bringing charges against nine defendants [*United States v. Molina*]. Six defendants eventually pled guilty, while three others are fugitives from justice.

I recently received a letter from the Justice Department detailing numerous examples of forced labor and sex slavery cases all across the country - from California to Maryland, Hawaii to New Jersey, Georgia to New Hampshire. Without objection, that letter will be entered into the record. And we are honored to have before the subcommittee today two distinguished U.S. Attorneys from Texas, who bring with them tragic tales to tell from their respective districts.

Thankfully, Congress and the Administration have been working closely together in recent years to combat human trafficking. Congress has enacted legislation such as the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 - to strengthen federal criminal slavery statutes, to provide victims with basic human needs so that they can begin the road to recovery, and to encourage their cooperation with law enforcement so that others will not suffer a similar fate. Just last fall, we enacted legislation to reauthorize and strengthen that Act.

The Administration has responded to the call, by dramatically increasing efforts and devoting substantially more resources toward combating human trafficking. Under the leadership of the Civil Rights Division, the Justice Department has prosecuted and convicted three times the number of traffickers over the past three fiscal years as in the preceding three years. The Department has created an office of Special Counsel for Trafficking Issues to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts, published educational and awareness-raising materials and circulated them to officials across America, and provided assistance to victims by installing a toll-free hotline.

In addition, the Department has already established state and local task forces in Philadelphia, Atlanta, Phoenix, and Tampa, to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts of federal, state, and local government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in those areas. Clearly, the Department recognizes that the support of local officials, in government and in the private sector alike, is absolutely essential to any successful effort to uncover the evil acts of human trafficking and slavery that are so carefully hidden in numerous pockets across America. I look forward to working with the Department to begin establishing such task forces in the state of Texas later this year.

And next week, the Justice Department is sponsoring a historic "National Conference on Human Trafficking" in Tampa, Florida - bringing together federal, state, and local officials, social service agencies, and NGOs, to provide training and coordination to anti-human trafficking efforts across the country, as provided in the fiscal year 2004 appropriations bill.

I also applaud Congress for recognizing the problem. Today's hearing is certainly not the first Congressional hearing to bring attention to the deeply disturbing problem of human trafficking - and it must not be the last. My colleagues and I must continue to vigilantly monitor the situation, and to consider whether further legislation is necessary to bolster the Department's efforts.

For example, if further improvements to our federal criminal slavery and peonage statutes would assist prosecutors and facilitate legitimate prosecutions, so be it. If federal legislation is needed to ensure that immigration T-Visas and other important and compassionate protections are provided to true victims of human trafficking and slavery, let's do it. If more state laws are necessary to ensure that federal efforts are accompanied by robust efforts at the state and local level, let's encourage it. My home state of Texas, as well as the states of Washington and Florida, have led the way by enacting state criminal laws against human trafficking. Other states should seriously consider joining the cause.

Human traffickers peddle in human misery. They smuggle innocent human beings into this country, and condemn them to lives of forced labor or sex slavery. For countless numbers of victims, the American dream quickly turns into an American nightmare. Such tales of human

suffering should not exist anywhere in the world - and especially not in the United States of America.

I want to close my remarks by quoting a man whose passing Americans continue to mourn. On January 11, 1989, President Reagan delivered his 34th - and final - address from the Oval Office. In that farewell address, he said, and I quote: "America is freedom - freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of enterprise. And freedom is special and rare. It's fragile; it needs protection."

The American commitment to eradicating human trafficking and slavery from our midst is a solemn vow - reflecting the highest traditions of our Founding Fathers, and the drafters of the Thirteenth Amendment. It is a commitment to the principles of freedom and liberty that Americans have fought and died to protect - a commitment that Americans across the nation commemorated just three days ago. And it is a profoundly moral commitment - not just to punish violators of our criminal laws, but to repel an assault on our Nation's core beliefs about the fundamental worth and dignity of every human being.