

Statement of
The Honorable Russ Feingold

United States Senator
Wisconsin
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Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing on human trafficking and the U.S. government's efforts to combat this deplorable practice. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses about the work they are doing to prosecute traffickers, provide services to victims, and raise awareness of this issue.

Human trafficking is one of the more pernicious violations of global human rights. It is also one of the fastest growing areas of international criminal activity. According to its 2004 Trafficking in Persons Report, the State Department estimates that 600,000 to 800,000 victims of human trafficking are transported across international borders each year. Estimates of the number of people trafficked into the United States each year range from 14,500 to 17,500. Victims of trafficking include men, women, and children who are trafficked for forced farm labor, domestic servitude, sweatshop labor, forced prostitution, construction work, restaurant work, or adoption. The U.S. Department of Justice, as well as state and local law enforcement, is confronting this international human rights problem by prosecuting traffickers and providing services to victims. I look forward to exploring these efforts with the witnesses today.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to see a bipartisan effort to confront human trafficking and a commitment to this issue by both the current Bush Administration and the Clinton Administration. I also think that we cannot review our government's efforts in this area without recognizing the contributions of the late Senator Paul Wellstone. I know this was an important issue to my dear friend and colleague and his wife Sheila.

Senator Wellstone was one of the first legislators to recognize this escalating abuse of human rights, just as the U.S. government and international organizations were beginning to identify trafficking in human beings as a serious international problem. Senator Wellstone brought his unique passion, zeal, and integrity to this issue. His efforts culminated in a resolution introduced in 1998 calling human trafficking a global human rights problem and directing the State Department to review it and report to Congress on its findings. Senator Wellstone continued his efforts in 1999 by introducing the first comprehensive anti-trafficking bill in Congress. Working with Senator Brownback, his efforts resulted in enactment of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act in 2000. That law, I believe, is one of Senator Wellstone's greatest achievements and one of the most important pieces of his legacy to our nation and to unknown numbers of victims of trafficking for years to come. I supported both pieces of legislation, and I know Senator Wellstone would welcome our efforts today to explore a human rights problem he was so passionate about years ago.

President Clinton also recognized the horror of this global human rights abuse and the need for the United States to make every effort to combat human trafficking. In March 1998, President Clinton issued a directive establishing a U.S. government-wide anti-trafficking strategy to prevent human trafficking, prosecute traffickers, and protect and support victims. The Clinton Administration outlined the need for programs to increase economic opportunities for potential victims, legislation to provide services to victims, and increased penalties for traffickers. Additionally, the Workers' Exploitation Task Force, chaired by the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and the Labor Department's Solicitor's Office, was charged with investigating and prosecuting cases of exploitation and trafficking. The State Department funded the creation of a database on U.S. and international legislation on trafficking. And, of course, the Clinton Administration worked with Congress on legislation to combat trafficking, culminating in the passage of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000.

I am pleased that President Bush has continued this commitment to combating human trafficking. I hope we can continue to work in a bipartisan fashion. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how effective our efforts have been in fighting this global human rights menace and what suggestions they might have for making improvements. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman.