



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

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Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Exploitation and Enforcement: Evaluating the Department of Homeland Security's Efforts to Counter Uyghur Forced Labor

October 19, 2023

I am pleased that we are holding this Subcommittee hearing today to shine a spotlight on the administration and enforcement of the *Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act* (UFLPA).

UFLPA was necessary to combat the horrific genocide and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the People's Republic of China against the Uyghur population. This minority group has been systematically persecuted for decades, but in recent years the Chinese government has forcibly detained over 1 million ethnic Uyghur people and other Muslims in reeducation centers, using threats, violence, and fear to force them into accepting employment in labor intensive industries.

Ensuring that U.S. consumers are not unwittingly supporting human rights violations by purchasing goods made wholly or in part using forced labor from the Xinjiang region of China is truly an issue of bipartisan importance. I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today about the ongoing implementation of this relatively new law, and what more can be done to achieve full compliance.

I expect that some of what we may hear today will be critical of how the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has not yet done enough to prevent the importation of goods made with forced labor, which in turn undercuts the competitiveness of American companies who abide by the law. It is critical that we help ensure that American companies that do not engage in human rights violations can fairly compete in the global marketplace and are not unduly disadvantaged.

However, it's important to note that, by passing UFLPA, Congress has asked DHS, and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in particular, to quickly establish new policies and procedures in addition to hiring hundreds of new employees to carry out this important work. It will take time for DHS to fully develop the manpower and expertise needed to inspect and halt every shipment that contains goods made with forced labor, but that does not mean that the Department isn't committed to the goals of the Act.

Since the beginning of 2022, the Department has created and implemented a strategy which establishes that ending forced labor is a moral, economic, and national security priority for DHS. As of last month, CBP has stopped over 5,000 shipments of goods valued at over \$1.8 billion for review and consequently denied entry into the U.S. for over 2,300 shipments. Additionally, DHS has created and published a list of entities known to utilize forced labor, and the Department has participated in adjudications with companies that may object to their inclusion. Ensuring that the companies on this list meet the criteria and are not unfairly included takes time and careful consideration.

As companies grapple with the new requirements of UFLPA and discover ways to evade the intent of the law, it will be essential for DHS to have continued support from Congress. Whether that requires more funding to bolster CBP's trade enforcement and DHS's expansion of the entities list, or new restrictions on what can and cannot be imported, Members on this Committee and others must remain engaged. It remains critically important that we uphold American values by fully enforcing this Act and meeting these challenges head on.

I look forward to hearing what recommendations our witnesses have today for improving the implementation of UFLPA. I also hope we can hold a subsequent hearing with witnesses from DHS and CBP to hear directly about the challenges they are facing and how this Committee can best support their vital work on prohibiting the import of goods made with forced labor.

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Media contact: Adam Comis at 202-225-9978