



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Joint Hearing Statement of Border Security & Enforcement Subcommittee Ranking Member Lou Correa (D-CA)

The Broken Path: How Transnational Criminal Organizations Profit from Human Trafficking at the Southwest Border

November 14, 2023

First, it is important to note the difference between human smuggling and human trafficking. Human smuggling is a crime against the United States and occurs when a person pays for a service – like transportation or fraudulent documents, in order illegally enter the country.

Human trafficking, on the other hand, is a crime of exploitation. It occurs when someone uses force, fraud, or coercion to compel another person to work or engage in the sex trade or forced labor. This most commonly happens after someone is already in the United States. Human trafficking can happen in any industry and to people of any age, gender, and nationality. These crimes occur around the world, and they happen far too frequently in the United States.

The Department of State estimates that 27.6 million people are victims of trafficking at any given time, worldwide. Sadly, many of these individuals are often hidden right in plain sight. U.S. citizens may not even realize they are working alongside someone who is being trafficked. And unfortunately, we do not realize the full magnitude of this problem due to the hidden nature of these crimes. For decades, this country has been unable to gather the statistics needed to understand the scale of this problem.

Human trafficking is a multi-billion-dollar industry and Transnational Criminal Organizations, or TCOs, are preying on vulnerable individuals to make a dime. Not only do TCOs traffick vulnerable people, but family members, strangers, friends, and even businesses looking to take advantage of individuals in need of work to increase their profits can be traffickers. On the separate issue of human smuggling, we know that TCOs prey on vulnerable migrants coming to this country who are seeking protection, freedom, and the hope of a better life for themselves and their families.

You see, we've all read the reporting, attended the briefings, and some of us have visited Latin America. We know why migrants are fleeing their homes. They're being forced out by violence and persecution. Parents are forced to choose whether their child will be coerced into joining a gang or make the tough decision to send them through a jungle to reach the border. The many Facebook posts, TikToks, and YouTube videos from human smugglers deceive them into thinking that freedom and safety are just a few payments away. We know that's not true and why it's imperative to fight against the disinformation campaigns of these traffickers.

To fight against TCOs, human trafficking, and human smuggling crimes of this magnitude, we must engage in comprehensive solutions. I commend the Biden Administration, Secretary Mayorkas, and DHS for building one of the strongest anti-human trafficking responses in the world which focuses on prevention, consequences, and international cooperation.

That's why I was deeply disturbed by my colleagues' recent press release that would claim that President Biden and Secretary Mayorkas would work "in partnership" with cartels. Instead of using this rhetoric, we as members of Congress should be working together to create comprehensive solutions to combat crimes of this magnitude. We are doing more than we ever have to combat this issue, but more needs to be done.

Comprehensive solutions mean developing strong legislation in a bipartisan manner to combat these criminals. It means investing in programs at the federal, state, and local levels to support anti-trafficking organizations that are on the front lines helping the victims of these crimes. And it means strengthening our partnerships with our international partners who will support us in combating TCOs. I believe bipartisan solutions can address these heinous crimes. For example, Chairman Higgins and I put forth bipartisan legislation, "The Cooperation on Combating Human Smuggling and Trafficking Act," to expand transnational criminal investigative units that dismantle human smuggling and human trafficking operations in Latin America.

Finally, as I've said before, we can better solve our problems with effective foreign partnerships. We are in the midst of a global movement and displacement of people that we have never seen in our hemisphere. This is just not a U.S. problem; it is a global problem. Transnational Criminal Organizations and others see the desperation of people fleeing war, corruption, and dire economic conditions as an opportunity to make money. We need to partner with our neighbors to the south, north, and across the globe to end these heinous trafficking crimes.

I want to thank our witnesses for joining us today and I look forward to hearing their recommendations on how we in Congress can help to end these trafficking crimes and protect the vulnerable populations who fall prey to these criminals both here at home and abroad.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at 202-225-9978