



# U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

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STATEMENT

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REGARDING A FIELD HEARING ON

*“COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN OUR MAJOR CITIES”*

BEFORE THE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

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Texas Southern University  
Houston, Texas

## INTRODUCTION

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE's) comprehensive efforts to combat human traffickers who exploit men, women and children, and to share with you our efforts in this fight against a form of modern day slavery. I am proud to lead ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) office here in Houston, which has a significant role in investigating human trafficking crimes and bringing perpetrators of these human rights abuses to justice.

DHS is one of the lead federal law enforcement agencies responsible for investigating and preventing human trafficking. Our investigative authority, screening authority, and most of our assistance programs are authorized under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) and the subsequent reauthorizations. The men and women of DHS are dedicated to combating the heinous crime of human trafficking using the programs and authorities provided to us by Congress and the President. The Blue Campaign coordinates and unites this work.

The Blue Campaign works with our federal government colleagues, foreign governments, international organizations, law enforcement at all levels, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the faith-based community, the private sector, and the general public to share ideas and resources and build a force-multiplying network of diverse but complementary parts. Partnerships augment our efforts by bringing together diverse experiences, amplifying messages, and leveraging resources. Together, we can effectively combat human trafficking by making sure that people understand the crime, recognize its indicators, and know how to seek help and report tips.

## **The Global Scope of Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking takes on countless hidden forms of exploitation. Trafficking is not limited to urban high crime areas, but is also found in rural agricultural sectors as well as in private homes in affluent neighborhoods. We know that adult men and women are victimized, along with children, and that U.S. citizens are not immune to the actions of traffickers.

Traffickers prey on vulnerable populations who have little or no safety net. Men, women and children are trafficked into forced labor, domestic servitude, and commercial sexual exploitation in the United States and throughout the world. Many of these victims are lured from their homes with false promises of legitimate employment, and then forced or coerced into involuntary servitude, migrant farming, sweatshops and other exploitative labor in addition to the commercial sex industry.

ICE makes every effort to not only find and rescue victims, but to target and cripple the financial infrastructure and illicit proceeds that allow human trafficking organizations to perpetuate their exploitation. ICE utilizes all of its authorities and resources in a cohesive global enforcement response in order to dismantle the global criminal infrastructure engaged in human trafficking. ICE has developed a comprehensive strategy to combat these criminal organizations through coordination with NGOs and law enforcement, both domestically and abroad, to identify and provide services to trafficking victims and coordinate investigations.

Given the international scope of human trafficking, ICE utilizes its strong international relationships through over 75 offices overseas located in 48 countries to identify and pursue criminal organizations. In order to fully address the transnational scope of these organizations, ICE investigations begin in the source countries where trafficking begins, continues into transit countries, and concludes in the destination countries.

## **Strategic Approach to Combating Human Trafficking**

To enhance our investigative capability, target human traffickers globally, and rescue victims, HSI has developed a comprehensive strategy, known as the ICE Trafficking in Persons Strategy (ICE TIPS), which embraces a victim-centered approach. The primary components of this strategy are outreach, coordination and coalition building.

- ***Outreach*** – HSI domestic and attaché offices conduct outreach and provide training to federal, state, local and foreign partners, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) regarding: 1) victim services, including short-term immigration relief for victims of trafficking; 2) HSI’s expertise and role in human trafficking investigations; and 3) ICE’s leading role in combating human trafficking. International outreach efforts focus on building awareness and increasing host governments’ efforts to combat human trafficking at source and transit countries.
- ***Coordination*** – No one entity alone can adequately address the problems presented by human trafficking. ICE recognizes that the most effective approach to combating human trafficking involves a collaborative partnership and coordination with law enforcement agencies, NGOs and private industry. ICE proudly partners with these organizations to develop leads, share information and work jointly on human trafficking investigations.
- ***Coalition Building*** – HSI develops and builds on existing partnerships with foreign governments, law enforcement, and NGOs to form long-term strategic relationships that foster collaboration in human trafficking investigations. ICE participates in the Department of Justice (DOJ)-funded Human Trafficking Task Forces (HTTFs) throughout the United States to help unite the investigative abilities of law enforcement with victim services agencies in order to provide a coordinated response during

trafficking investigations and victim rescues. The HTTFs ensure that the requirements of law enforcement are balanced against the needs of the victims discovered during the course of investigations.

### **Adding to these Efforts**

HSI helped form a new federal human trafficking initiative in 2011 called Anti-Trafficking Coordination Teams (ACTeams) as part of a nationwide Human Trafficking Enhanced Enforcement Initiative designed to streamline federal criminal investigations and prosecutions of human trafficking offenses. ACTeams bring together federal law enforcement personnel from ICE, the DOJ's Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Department of Labor (DOL) Wage and Hour Division, and DOL's Office of the Inspector General, with federal prosecutors from United States Attorney's Offices and DOJ to develop significant federal human trafficking investigations and prosecutions.

### **The Victims Assistance Program**

ICE is fully committed to victim-centered investigations and believes victims can be effective, reliable witnesses for successful prosecutions. The victim's testimony provides strong evidence in a criminal prosecution, and victims must be treated with respect and dignity. HSI's Victim Assistance Program (VAP) provides a critical resource to HSI investigations and the ensuing criminal prosecutions by safeguarding victims' rights and ensuring access to the services to which they are entitled by law, as well as providing the assistance they need so that they can participate actively and fully in the criminal justice system process.

The VAP Victim Assistance Specialists support HSI's approximately 6,500 special agents and train them on victims' rights, immigration relief for foreign national victims, human trafficking, child exploitation, forensic interviewing, and other victim issues. Victim Assistance Specialists also assist victims with resources and service referrals for federal, state, and local crime victim services, as well as referrals to non-governmental and community based victim service providers. In addition, these specialists support requests and disbursements of funding for urgent, short-term victim needs. They provide on-site victim assistance and operational planning in complex cases involving large numbers of rescued victims, as well as coordination and assistance in cases in which foreign victims are brought to the United States to testify. In addition to assistance for victims, another service provided by HSI's VAP is the Victim Notification Program and hotline, which provides for those prior victims who register notifications of the release from incarceration or removal of criminal alien offenders.

Along with the Victim Assistance Specialists, VAP has four Forensic Interview Specialists (FIS) to conduct legally defensible, victim-sensitive, fact-finding, forensic interviews, which are developmentally appropriate and take into account the victim's age, language skills, mental health and learning capacity. The VAP FISs also assist with case coordination, operational planning and case review both domestically and abroad.

### **Making an Impact**

Over the past five years, ICE has more than doubled the number of human trafficking investigations initiated worldwide. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2013, ICE opened over 1,000 investigations with a nexus to human trafficking that resulted in over 1,800 criminal arrests, the largest numbers of human trafficking cases and criminal arrests ever recorded.

For example, on February 15, 2011, HSI Detroit initiated an investigation after receiving information from local law enforcement and school authorities indicating that a suspect was trafficking four minor children from Togo for forced labor. The investigation revealed that the suspect had petitioned under his asylum application claiming the children were his own, however, investigators discovered that he was not the true father of the children and that he had supplied fraudulent birth certificates in support of their immigration petition. The children stated that they were forced to work in the house, complete all household duties and care for the suspect's daily needs; and if these duties were not completed, food was withheld or the children were beaten and punished in various ways. HSI Detroit worked with Child Protective Services to ensure that all of the victims' needs were being met. The children were also referred to the University of Michigan Human Trafficking Clinic, which provided them with legal services and assistance with receiving their T-visas. HSI arrested the suspect on May 3, 2011, for five violations including human trafficking. The suspect later pleaded guilty to the visa fraud, mail fraud, and harboring aliens and was found guilty on four counts of forced labor following a federal jury trial in the Eastern District of Michigan. On March 25, 2013, he was sentenced to 135 months imprisonment and ordered to pay \$134,000 in restitution to the victims.

In January 2012, HSI Sioux Falls, South Dakota, conducted an investigation into the sex trafficking of minor females in the Sioux Falls metro area. HSI agents worked jointly with federal and local law enforcement partners to identify several individuals with gang ties who were prostituting numerous women, including minors. The investigation revealed that these individuals were involved in other criminal activities including money laundering, narcotics and weapons smuggling. The investigation identified two minor female victims and one adult female victim who traffickers lured into their control and exploited for commercial sex acts. A

successful sting operation led to the rescue of the girls and the arrest of their traffickers. One victim was assaulted repeatedly over the course of eight months and forced to perform commercial sex acts in South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois. As a result of this investigation, four suspects were arrested and charged with Sex Trafficking of Children or by Force, Fraud or Coercion, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1591. The main suspect was found guilty by a jury and sentenced to three life sentences for Sex Trafficking by Force, Fraud, or Coercion, and Sex Trafficking of a Child. He was also sentenced to 20 years for Interstate Transportation for Prostitution. Two of the remaining suspects were found guilty and also sentenced; one to 30 years, and one to 33 ½ years. The final suspect is still awaiting sentencing.

### **Immigration Relief for Foreign Victims of Human Trafficking**

DHS has streamlined its training about immigration relief for victims to increase awareness among law enforcement agencies. These short- and long-term relief options assist law enforcement in stabilizing victims so that the victim can begin to recover and rebuild his or her life. Victims of trafficking who are non-U.S. citizens can receive immigration relief from ICE and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). ICE can provide a short-term immigration relief known as “Continued Presence,” which assists certified victims of trafficking to remain in the United States temporarily, and USCIS can provide immigration relief through the T (Victims of Human Trafficking) and U (Victims of Criminal Activity) visas. USCIS adjudicates applications for non-immigrant status related to an individual’s certification as a victim of a severe form of trafficking. This non-immigrant status provides longer-term forms of relief for trafficking victims.



## **CONCLUSION**

ICE remains committed to utilizing its authorities and resources to combat human trafficking and identify and rescue the victims of this horrific crime. We will build upon the successes of our outreach and victim-centered approach, and share our lessons learned and expertise to expand the global fight against this horrific crime. We will continue to dismantle and disrupt the criminal organizations engaged in human trafficking until we end the threat that human trafficking poses.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today and for your continued support of ICE and its law enforcement mission. I would be pleased to answer any questions.