



Statement by Congressman Alcee L. Hastings
Chairman
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Hearing on
“Combating Trafficking for Forced Labor Purposes in the OSCE Region”
October 11, 2007

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this Helsinki Commission hearing on combating trafficking for forced labor purposes in the OSCE Region, including the United States.

Trafficking in human beings is an egregious human rights violation and a serious transnational crime facing governments all over the world. According to a 2005 International Labor Organization report, of the 12.3 million victims of forced labor, approximately 2.4 million were trafficked for forced labor purposes.

Trafficking for forced labor is a major problem in many OSCE countries. In Armenia, for example, both men and women are trafficked for forced labor, while an International Organization for Migration (IOM) report asserts that 38 percent of trafficked persons assisted by IOM in Belarus were male victims of forced labor. Although the U.S., like many other OSCE states, continues to be challenged by limitations in the systems utilized for data gathering in human trafficking cases, we have seen progress in our anti-trafficking efforts. In one significant case, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, working with the FBI successfully investigated and prosecuted organized criminals who were trafficking Eastern European women into the United States to work as exotic dancers in Michigan. In his book *Nobodies: Modern American Slave Labor and the Dark Side of the New Global Economy*, John Bowe describes three cases of forced labor in the U.S.: in Immokalee, Florida, Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Saipan (a U.S. commonwealth in the Western Pacific).

Trafficking for forced labor frequently involves physical and psychological abuse of the victims; generates millions of dollars in illicit financial profits to the perpetrators, which are often organized criminal groups; and leads to thousands of migrants crossing international borders with fraudulent documents.

Trafficking in persons for forced labor purposes is less understood than trafficking for sexual exploitation because it has largely remained a hidden form of exploitation. However, it is no less serious. In the OSCE region, it has accelerated in recent years as a result of the economic disruption caused by the collapse of Communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as well as the wars in the former Yugoslavia. A high worldwide demand for women and children as sex workers, sweatshop labor and domestic servants has fueled the market for forced labor. At the same time, increasing restrictions on immigration to many destination countries, including the United States and Western Europe has led many migrants to turn to human traffickers, despite the risks involved.

The OSCE demonstrated its commitment to combating trafficking in human beings in 2003, with the adoption of the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings. Among other requirements, the Action Plan calls upon member states to make forced labor a crime by incorporating the definition of human trafficking contained in the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. The establishment of the position of Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings has given greater focus to addressing this critical challenge in the OSCE region.

Since the adoption of these anti-trafficking protocols, the OSCE participating states have made significant strides in combating the sexual dimension of human trafficking. But there is a growing consensus that more needs to be done to understand the scope and challenge of humans trafficked for forced servitude.

Presently, many member states have not adopted legislation to specifically address trafficking for forced labor purposes. In addition, much of the resources and early anti-trafficking efforts have been directed at identifying and prosecuting sexual trafficking cases. The U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000, which was authored by Helsinki Commission Ranking Member Christopher Smith, includes in its definition of human trafficking, “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.”

Yet, we have seen relatively few prosecutions of forced labor perpetrators. A September 23rd Washington Post article on the subject of human trafficking raises several questions which are worthy of examination: Are there in fact, significant numbers of trafficking cases that go undetected? Or do we simply not have a full grasp of the scope of human trafficking? Or conversely, how reliable are trafficking statistics?

This morning, we examine these issues as we hear from two expert panels on efforts to combat trafficking for forced labor purposes in the OSCE region. We look forward to the testimony of three key U.S. government agencies, represented by Ambassador Mark Lagon, from the Department of State, Ms. Charlotte Ponticelli, from the Department of Labor; and Mr. Michael Feinberg, from the Department of Homeland Security’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement. We are also grateful to have the participation of Ms. Eva Biaudet, the OSCE’s Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Mr. Roger Plant,

of the International Labor Organization, and Mr. Kevin Bales, of Free the Slaves. The witnesses bios are available at the entrance.

Without objection, your prepared statements will be entered into the Record. Please summarize your oral testimony. Ambassador Lagon, you may begin.