



United States Helsinki Commission

Hearing to Consider

Combating Trafficking for Forced Labor Purposes in the OSCE Region

**Statement by Charlotte M. Ponticelli
Deputy Undersecretary for International Affairs
U.S. Department of Labor
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Opening Remarks

Good morning, Chairman Hastings, Co-Chairman Cardin, and distinguished members of the United States Helsinki Commission. I am pleased to be here today on behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor. Thank you for holding this hearing on the trafficking of humans for the purpose of forced labor—one of today’s worst human rights tragedies. It is an honor to be here today with my fellow panelists, who are all dedicated to the global fight against human trafficking—Ambassador Mark Lagon (U.S. State Department/G-TIP), Mr. Michael Feinberg (U.S. Department of Homeland Security), Ms. Eva Biaudet (OSCE), Mr. Roger Plant (ILO), and Mr. Kevin Bales (Free the Slaves).

The United States is committed to ending the brutal practice of human trafficking. As President George Bush stated at the signing of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act in January 2006, “Our nation is *determined* to fight and end this modern form of slavery.” In signing this legislation, the President also called upon other nations to take action. The U.S. Government is working at home and with other governments, such as the 56 countries participating in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to eliminate human trafficking around the world. Alone, we can have an impact, but together we can have an even greater and more lasting impact.

Issue

Across the world, the transnational phenomenon of human trafficking involves both trafficking for sex and labor exploitation. Trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation in OSCE countries, particularly in Eastern Europe, opened the world’s

eyes to the global problem of trafficking. Yet as we know from the ILO's 2005 report *A Global Alliance Against Forced Labour*, most victims of trafficking in the world are actually victims of forced labor. Private agents typically traffic these individuals through coercion, forcing them to toil in sweatshops and other hidden workplaces under brutal conditions with no access to legal protections.

In the OSCE region, the trafficking of adults for forced labor in the construction and agricultural industries is pervasive and the trafficking of children for commercial sexual exploitation and labor remains a grave problem. Children specifically trafficked for labor find themselves forced into begging, petty crime, street vending, and domestic work; or work in agriculture, construction, or manufacturing.

Albanian children, for instance, are often trafficked to beg in Greece or Italy. Other children from Eastern Europe, especially from orphanages and vulnerable Roma (Gypsy) populations, are trafficked to beg on the streets of large cities throughout Europe. They are often physically abused, underfed, addicted to drugs or alcohol, and have no access to education and health services. Children from Central Asia are trafficked, often by their parents or acquaintances, for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation or for strenuous labor in markets, construction sites, and agriculture.

Policy & Program Gap

The illicit and hidden nature in which human trafficking occurs sometimes makes the search for solutions seem insurmountable. Yet significant progress is being made, especially in research and data collection—key tools in the fight. OSCE member states have underscored the need for reliable research and data on the nature and magnitude of the trafficking problem to design policies and implement programs for prevention, and protection and assistance to victims.

From the Department of Labor's work on eliminating the worst forms of child labor internationally, data collection and research have been central to increasing our knowledge of the extent and nature of the exploitive child labor, including the trafficking of children. In compliance with Trade Promotion Authority, for example, the Department issues reports on respect for core labor standards, including forced labor, for all nations which the U.S. seeks negotiations for a trade agreement. The Department also produces the Congressionally mandated Trade and Development Act *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* report that includes information on forced child labor and child trafficking in 141 countries. Data collection and research efforts at the Department have laid the ground work

for identifying priorities, designing strategies, and measuring and monitoring progress towards the elimination of these problems. The July 2007 Government Accountability Office's Report on Human Trafficking acknowledged that the Department of Labor had the necessary elements in place to monitor and measure the performance of its anti-trafficking projects.

Nonetheless, the development of policy and collection of data should not preclude the immediate and urgent need to rescue those men, women, and children who have been trafficked for forced labor.

U.S. Government Response & DOL Perspective

At the Department of Labor, we are engaged both domestically and internationally in efforts to combat trafficking in persons for commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. This engagement builds upon the Department of Labor's long history of working to protect and assist vulnerable workers.

The Department's Bureau of International Labor Affairs has been active in combating trafficking around the world, including in many OSCE countries, and has enlisted the support of several international, nongovernmental, and faith-based organizations. So far, more than 1 million children have been rescued from the worst forms of child labor and provided with education and training opportunities through DOL-funded projects.

Since 1995, the Department of Labor has obligated over \$595 million to organizations globally to prevent and withdraw children from exploitative work. Of this amount, the Department has set aside more than 40 percent, or \$219 million, to combat trafficking in persons for the purpose of labor and commercial sexual exploitation. In this year alone, the Department provided \$28.4 million to address the trafficking of children for commercial sexual exploitation and labor purposes.

Excellent examples of emerging good practices to eliminate the trafficking of women and children for labor are from U.S. Department of Labor-funded projects in the OSCE region. In 2003, the Department of Labor funded a \$1.5 million regional project through the ILO to work in the Central and Eastern European countries of Albania, Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine. This project, entitled PROTECT CEE (Project of Technical Assistance Against the Labor and Sexual Exploitation of Children, including Trafficking, in Countries of Central and Eastern Europe), assisted in the rescue of 2,600 children. Children were provided with educational opportunities, skills training, and the necessary psychosocial

interventions. The project was also successful in working with governments to advance legal reforms, including bilateral agreements, to protect and assist child victims of trafficking. At the community level, local government units in pilot areas have established child labor monitoring systems comprised of teachers, labor inspectors, and health professionals to document and refer trafficking victims to social service providers for rehabilitation services. To expand on these efforts, we funded a second phase of the project at \$ 3.5 million in FY 2006 to include Bulgaria and the UN Administered Province of Kosovo.

Through President Bush's \$50 million anti-trafficking initiative, ILAB also funded a \$1.25 million project through Catholic Relief Services in the Republic of Moldova in 2004. The project targets young, at-risk women and seeks to reduce the incidence of trafficking and assist victims through a combination of job development, employment assistance, and skills training. We have found that a root factor contributing to the vulnerability of trafficking victims—poverty—can be tackled by creating economic incentives and employment opportunities that offer legitimate and sustainable forms of income.

The U.S. Department of Labor has also been pleased to participate in the last two sessions of the OSCE *Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons Conference*. Experts from the Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division shared the unique way investigators carry out civil law enforcement in the nation's workplaces, and are able to identify individuals who have been trafficked into forced labor in the United States. Working to ensure compliance with domestic labor laws such as the Fair Labor Standards Act and the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, Wage and Hour investigators monitor workplaces, especially low-wage industries, on a daily basis and are often the first government authorities to witness exploitive conditions and talk to victims.

By participating in more than 38 local human trafficking taskforces around the country, which include federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies as well as nongovernmental organizations, faith-based organizations, and assistance based organizations, the Wage and Hour Division takes part in law-enforcement networks designed to end the practice of human trafficking in the United States. In fiscal year 2007, the Wage and Hour Division collected over \$85,900 in back wages and liquidated damages for 61 workers in response to 7 task force-referred or other trafficking-related investigations.

It is this type of collaboration and information sharing that will allow us to advance our efforts and make a real difference.

Closing Remarks

At the Department of Labor, we are continuing to focus on several critical areas in the fight against human trafficking: institutional and legal reforms, capacity building to implement these reforms, and direct assistance to victims and potential victims. We are proud to be a part of the U.S. Government's interagency efforts involving the Department of State, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice, and U.S. Agency for International Development to assist current victims of trafficking, and those at-risk of entering harm's way.

I want to commend the Helsinki Commission for helping to bring the plight of trafficking victims in the OSCE region to the attention of the American public.

Thank you again for allowing me to join you today for this important event.