

Opening Statement of Senator Jeffrey S. Chiesa
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Hearing: "Combatting Human Trafficking: Federal, State, and Local Perspectives"
September 23, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin by thanking you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this hearing. I also want to commend your leadership, not just of this Committee, but also on the issue of human trafficking. Human trafficking – more accurately called modern day slavery – is a plague on our Nation and on the world. It is, to put it bluntly, a crime against humanity. It is a crime against the dignity of every person who is victimized by the ruthless criminals who trade in human beings. And it is a crime against society. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." And it is happening, not just in some foreign lands; it is happening here, in our own country. And it's time – indeed, it is past time – to put an end to it.

We must not be content to make just a dent in human trafficking. We must do everything we can to eliminate it – to abolish modern day slavery from our country and around the world. This is an ambitious goal, but it is not an impossible dream. We must commit ourselves to ending the nightmare that the millions of victims of human trafficking are living every day. Because none of us would give up our freedom for even a day, all of us must dedicate ourselves to ensuring that no one else suffers that fate.

There are more people in slavery around the world today than at any other time in history. As many as 27 million people around the world being held in bondage, forced to work in unsafe, degrading, inhumane conditions. That's the equivalent to three-times the entire population of New Jersey – or 30-times the entire population of Delaware. And an estimated 100,000 of them are right here in the United States. Deprived of their liberty, subject to unspeakable abuse, the victims of human traffickers cry for help. But, too often, their cries are unheard. Today, in this hearing, we are giving them a voice. We are hearing their pleas for rescue and for freedom. And most important, we are committing ourselves to answering their cries.

The war to eradicate human trafficking must be fought on many fronts. It requires the concerted, sustained efforts of law enforcement – federal, state, and local. Intergovernmental cooperation is essential to success. It requires legislators at every level to provide the resources that law enforcement needs to sustain an effective effort to bring human traffickers to justice. And it's not adequate to provide just enough resources to fund a limited effort. Without dedicated resources there cannot be a dedicated effort. It requires lawmakers to make changes to the laws that allow human traffickers to sell their victims with impunity. Modern slaves are no longer auctioned in the public square. They are sold on the internet and the back pages of newspapers. Human traffickers, and the publishers who take their advertisements, hide under the cloak of the First Amendment even though the First Amendment was never meant to protect criminal enterprises.

Eliminating human trafficking requires the active involvement of concerned citizens working together to raise awareness about this terrible problem and advocate change. Modern day slavery exists in the shadows, but it leaves clues to its existence that informed citizens can recognize and call attention to. And it requires the close cooperation of federal, state, and local governments. We must work together to uncover the crime where it exists, prosecute the criminals to the fullest extent of the law, and assist the victims so they are not twice victimized – first by their captors and then by the system that often treats the victims as criminals themselves.

As an assistant U.S. attorney and as the attorney general of New Jersey, I was in a position to ensure that we put in place the dedicated resources to sustain a dedicated effort to combat human trafficking. But I know that the vast majority of law enforcement agencies across the country and at every level find themselves limited in their efforts by limits on their resources. To our witnesses today, I ask you to be very candid in your assessment of where we stand in the fight against human trafficking and to tell us exactly what more we need to do to bring about its eradication.

We have seen over the years effective, short-term efforts to combat human trafficking in places where it seems to grow overnight and disperse just as quickly. International sporting events, such as the Super Bowl – which is being played in New Jersey this February – often attract huge numbers of human traffickers. And in New Jersey, we are seeing a coordinated effort to let human traffickers know that they are not welcome, and that if they decide to bring their evil trade to our state, they will pay a heavy price.

But as important as such efforts are, they are just part of the solution and they are temporary in nature. For human traffickers, there is no off-season. And for their victims, there are no by-weeks or time-outs. Their captors exploit them day in and day out for as long as they can. Mr. Chairman, I am very much looking forward to the testimony of our witnesses and just want to again thank you for convening this hearing.

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