

## Remarks of Assistant Attorney General

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### National Conference on Human Trafficking

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Colleagues and Friends—

I am honored to have the opportunity to address this gathering of leaders who are on the front lines in the fight against human trafficking.

This tenth anniversary of the TVPA, and this conference reflecting on *the TVPA Decade...Progress and Promise*—has particular significance for me.

- I had the privilege to serve as a young Civil Rights Division Prosecutor in the early 1990s, when we struggled to bring involuntary servitude and slavery cases before the TVPA;
- I then had the privilege to participate in convening the Worker Exploitation Task Force in the late 1990s, while serving as a senior official in the Civil Rights Division;
- And I now have the privilege of returning to head up the Division
- This time around, I am at once:
  - *gratified* to see that we have made tremendous strides in combating human trafficking
  - *chastened* to see that we still have a long way to go;
  - and *more committed than ever* to ending this intolerable deprivation of individual rights.

Those individual rights are the heart and soul of our nation.

But as we have learned from our painful history, all too often those individual **rights can ring hollow** unless and until we as a society undertake a **sustained struggle to transform them from an empty promise into a reality.**

And it is you, my friends, who are leading this struggle to make the promise of freedom real for victims of human trafficking, just as a generation of leaders before us led a struggle to give meaning to civil rights under the law.

Human trafficking is a crime that denies its victims the most basic of their fundamental rights—the rights to freedom, self-determination, and dignity. It is a crime that is intolerable in a society like ours founded on freedom and respect for our common humanity.

So I welcome this opportunity to come together

- both to **reflect on our progress**;
- and to **redouble our determination to deliver on the promise** of freedom to all human beings
- both those who are **born on our soil**, and those who find their ways to our shores

Yes, there has been tremendous progress. In my early days as a Civil Rights Prosecutor, we relied on the Involuntary Servitude and Slavery laws that made up our primitive tool kit before the TVPA.

These post-civil war statutes, aimed at eliminating badges and incidents of historic chattel slavery, allowed us to get at forms of oppression reminiscent of the old south, but they were ill suited to the evolving means of exploitation that were equally powerful in their effect—even if unfamiliar in their form.

But the reality was—as you’ve heard throughout this conference—that criminal statutes alone were not enough to meet the challenges of finding the victims, stabilizing them, and earning their trust.

So as much as we still face similar challenges of finding victims, earning their trust, and empowering them to speak out, we now do so with a far more powerful arsenal of:

- broader criminal statutes reaching more subtle and complex forms of coercion,
- of immigration protections allowing us to stabilize victims
- of victim assistance professionals to meet the needs of those traumatized by this insidious crime;

- and of strong partnerships and public awareness programs to raise our nation's awareness of these crimes being committed in our midst.

So, as much as we face challenges every single day in putting these tools to use, and as much as our implementation of these tools is a work in progress (and not always linear progress), the **work we've been able to get done---working together over the past decade--has been tremendous.**

See, back before the TVPA, we were only able to find and prosecute a small **handful of cases throughout the 1990s.**

Since that time, with the advent of our TVPA toolbox, we have been able to bring more cases and charge and convict more defendants than ever before.

In contrast to the scant numbers brought before the TVPA--**averaging just over three a year**—during the **first five years of the TVPA decade**, we evolved to bringing an average of **12.8 cases each year. During the past five years, to round out the TVPA's first decade**, we're now bringing an average of **over 36 cases a year.**

*The record 43 cases we brought last year—while not nearly as high as the volume we believe we can and must achieve-- would have seemed far beyond our reach in the pre-TVPA years when we were bringing an average of 3.2 cases a year, or even in the early TVPA years, when we were bringing just under 13 cases annually.*

I should note that last year's record number of cases included the most labor trafficking cases ever brought in a year—a **61% increase from the previous record. [please check haxam's math. I \*think\* an increase from 13 to 21 is a 61% increase but I sheepishly admit that I would really appreciate a second opinion]**

We've seen similar increases in the **number** of defendants we've been able to charge. After charging an average of **17 defendants a year \*before\* the TVPA --- our average climbed to 31 a year** during the first five TVPA years, and **over then to \*98\* a year in each of the past five years.**

Let's also take a look at how many defendants we're **convicting**. This has gone from an average of 11.4 a year for the five years *before* the TVPA, to **23** a year in the *first five* TVPA years, to **72 a year** over the past five years.

And these are just the forced labor and adult sex trafficking cases brought by the Civil Rights Division and US Attorneys' Offices—not even counting the child sex trafficking cases brought by the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section and their U.S. Attorney partners.

The numbers don't begin to tell the story. We're **breaking new ground** with each of these cases.

We're bringing cases of **unprecedented scope and impact**, some involving *elaborate criminal enterprises* charged with exploiting workers recruited from three different continents in operations spanning 12 states.

We're **moving the ball forward**, one step at a time, proving to courts and to juries that **subtle forms of coercion**—once beyond the reach of the law—can be every bit as powerful as physical violence in overcoming the will of vulnerable victims and depriving them of their rights to freedom, dignity, and self-determination.

We're securing restitution awards of thousands—and in a few cases millions--of dollars, getting the money away from the traffickers who treated other human beings as expendable commodities and back to the victims who earned it through their tears, sweat, and blood.

So, yes, in this tenth year of the TVPA, we have made some significant strides.

But—at the same time--we're all acutely aware that there is substantial work to be done.

We still struggle with the challenges of bringing victims out of the shadows and earning their trust, when the traffickers have gone to great lengths to silence them and breed their distrust of us.

We still struggle to transform our culture *so we can see trafficked human beings as \*crime victims, not criminals\**—even when they are undocumented, prostituted, drug-addicted, destitute, and sometimes downright deceptive, denying their victimization because of fear, shame, dependence, and distrust.

We still struggle to raise consciousness in our communities so we can detect the warning signs that are too often right before our eyes, invisible in plain sight.

But we will never relent in this struggle. As law enforcement officers **sworn to protect and serve**; as lawyers and officials who pledge to **uphold the law and the constitution**; as dedicated advocates giving care to those in crisis and voice to those who have been silenced; cannot speak for themselves; and as a **nation that recognizes the inherent worth of all human beings**, we will never relent in this struggle.

Not until our society learns what fear *really* means to those with nowhere to turn. Fear:

- of being beaten with belts and broken bottles,
- of being raped with no one to hear your cries—

- of the unknown, of being lost in strange land, with no way home;
- of devastating a family that has incurred crushing debt on the false promise of a brighter future;
- of humiliation for unspeakably acts forced and photographed by the trafficker to shame your loved ones back home;
- And all too often, fear of never seeing your children again--a blow to the human spirit more painful than any blow to the body.

We have seen traffickers prey upon all these fears to hold terrified victims in subservience in farm fields and factories, hair salons and hotels, brothels and bars. And we have seen traffickers use these chains of fear to hold ***all kinds of victims*** under their control: men and women, adults and children, undocumented migrants, documented guestworkers, and U.S. citizens, all of them deprived of their dignity, rights, and freedoms, their dreams of a better life turned into a nightmare.

So yes, we are proud of the progress and the record results returned in recent years.

**But as far as we have come, as long traffickers are still preying on vulnerable victims in our communities, we know that we have not come far enough.**

In listening to survivors who have found the courage to speak out, we have learned that for every victim found and rescued, scores more slipped away:

- their names recorded in ledgers seized from the scene of the crime;
- their faces etched in the memories of the rescued victims who briefly befriended them;
- their whereabouts and their fate unknown.

That is why **we cannot and will not rest on the achievements of the past decade;**

That is why we are **building on our momentum and redoubling our determination to dismantle criminal networks that trade in the toil of human beings.**

That is why we have, in recent months, been hard at work developing enhanced enforcement initiatives that we will be introducing to you over the coming months, to streamline federal investigations and prosecutions, to make our anti-trafficking strategies more effective than ever.

That is why we have strengthened our partnerships across international borders, collaborating closely with Mexican authorities to develop coordinated, bi-lateral strategies

to combat cross-border trafficking networks. This collaboration, although in its infancy, has already produced landmark prosecutions, and has already led us to victims who might otherwise have slipped away.

We will tirelessly work to strengthen these groundbreaking strategies-- **building on the progress of the past decade, until we fully deliver on the promise of freedom.**

I am humbled by the gathering here today of exceptional advocates who give a voice to victims too long silenced.

I am inspired by the open and energetic exchange among colleagues from diverse backgrounds, and from all corners of our great nation.

And I have endless admiration for the sustained commitment and sacrifice so many of you make year in and year out to what is truly one of the preeminent civil rights struggles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Civil Rights Division is determined to continue to work shoulder to shoulder with all of you, our key partners in the fight against human trafficking.

And we are determined never to waver from our shared commitment to this cause, until we eradicate modern-day slavery from the land of the free.

Thank you all for your partnership, over the past decade, and in the decades to come.