

U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

Human trafficking is frequently invisible. It is a crime of economic exploitation that occurs in the shadows, away from public view — its victims kept isolated from the community around them. The crime comes in many forms, from child prostitution, to restaurant workers and domestic servants held in forced labor, to sweat shop or farm laborers exploited through fear and violence. In years past, few people knew what human trafficking was, and the crime often went unrecognized by law enforcement. In the 10 years since the enactment of the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act, much has changed. The federal government is attacking human trafficking on many fronts, and the Department of Justice is at the forefront of those efforts.

Earlier this month, Attorney General Eric Holder, together with Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano and Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis, announced a national human trafficking enhanced enforcement initiative, intended to streamline federal investigations and prosecutions of human trafficking cases. Here in the Eastern District of California, we have already enhanced enforcement efforts. We appointed human trafficking coordinators in both the Sacramento and Fresno offices, and last year formed the North and Central California Anti-Trafficking Team (NCCATT), a regional task force consisting of federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, headed by Truckee Police Chief Nick Sensley. The purpose of NCCATT is to increase the detection and investigation of human trafficking offenses through training, information sharing, and coordination of law enforcement activities with victim service agencies such as the Rescue and Restore Coalition. In January, during National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention month, NCCATT sponsored its first training session, a one-day course in Sacramento in which about 130 federal, state and local law enforcement personnel were trained on human trafficking issues.

Last year, for the third year in a row, the Department of Justice nationally prosecuted more human trafficking cases than ever before. In this district, we have long been active in prosecuting cases involving sex trafficking of minors for commercial gain. Since 2006, this office has convicted at least 10 defendants of prostituting children, resulting in sentences of up to 40 years in prison. Seven of those defendants have been convicted since 2008, seven more defendants are currently awaiting trial, and more cases are under investigation. In many of these cases, defendants controlled the victims through acts of violence and cruelty. In late 2009, we secured three convictions in a case involving the exploitation of dozens of undocumented restaurant workers from China, Mexico and Central America. The victims worked seven days a week, were underpaid, and were kept crowded into substandard housing by the owners of the restaurants.

Many types of involuntary servitude and economic exploitation are difficult to detect and prosecute, but we are committed to attacking human trafficking in all its forms. With the formation of NCCATT, we expect that greater law enforcement familiarity with human trafficking indicators, combined with better services for victims to secure their safety, trust and cooperation, will lead to a greater diversity of human trafficking prosecutions.

Thank you.
United States Attorney
Benjamin B. Wagner