

**Statement of Michele A. Clark
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**House Committee on Government Reform
Subcommittee on Human Rights and Wellness**

“Trafficking in Persons in the United States: Unfinished Business”

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the invitation to testify today before the House Committee on Government Reform. It is an honor to be here to speak on behalf of victims of trafficking - American women as well as women from over 40 countries trafficked into the United States and brutally thrust into conditions of abuse, torture, serial rape and forced labor.

My name is Michele Clark and I am the co-director of The Protection Project, a human rights research institute located at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. For the past seven years, we have focused on documenting and analyzing the complex dimensions of human trafficking in the United States and around the world. We have worked with members of Congress and US Government agencies as well as representatives of foreign governments and NGOs to develop sound policy and practices in the war against trafficking and conduct training, here and abroad, on the provision of services to victims of trafficking, drafting anti-trafficking legislation, and identifying victims of trafficking.

Over the past two years, Protection Project staff have traveled to over 30 countries on 5 different continents, and to cities around the United States. On behalf of the many victims of trafficking we have spoken with in places as diverse as the Amazon jungle regions of Peru, prisons in the United Arab Emirates, villages of Moldova and neighborhoods of Washington, DC, Atlanta, Chicago and San Francisco, I would like to thank you for your strong support of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) as well as the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA), and your concerns, evidenced by this hearing, that these Acts be fully and properly implemented.

Public Misperceptions

The level of awareness of trafficking as a form of modern day slavery is growing. An understanding of what trafficking is, however, and how it impacts our daily lives, remains unclear. Our perceptions of human trafficking in the US are fueled by myths and misperceptions. We are confused and troubled, but because we do not understand, our default emotional response is to distance ourselves from the tragedy around us. What are some of the areas of misunderstanding?

- We still confuse abusive alien smuggling and human trafficking.
- We are still ignorant about domestic servitude in our own cities and find it hard to believe that human beings can be held in such conditions of slavery.
- We tend to believe that, if there is trafficking, it is usually for commercial sexual exploitation.
- We find it almost impossible to understand that clandestine brothels in affluent suburbs can exist, where women are forced to provide sexual services to men of the community and are then moved around to other cities in this country.
- If we do pause long enough to consider trafficking as a reality, we associate it with large cities and ports of entry, border states, or states which have a history of migrant farm workers. What we do not recognize is that trafficking trends have shifted to the Midwest, the Northwest, New England, and the Southwest. According to the Assessment of US Government Efforts to Combat Trafficking dated June 2004, trafficking cases have been documented in all but four states in this country.
- And finally, we tend to believe that trafficking is limited to foreign men and women, boys and girls. We are not ready to admit that this could happen to our own.

The Investigation and Prosecution of Trafficking Cases in the United States

According to the June 2004 Assessment of the US Government Activities to Combat Trafficking in Persons, a total of 153 trafficking investigations were open as of April 2004 within the Civil Rights Division of the US Department of Justice. Between Fiscal Years 2001 and 2003, prosecutions were initiated against 110 traffickers by the Civil Rights Division (DOJ) and US Attorneys offices, with 78 convictions and guilty pleas secured. In Fiscal Year 2003 alone, 30 defendants were charged. These numbers all represent significant increases from the previous years, with the rate of prosecutions having increased three-fold compared to the three fiscal years prior to 2001-2002, and with the rate of convictions doubling over the three fiscal years prior to 2001-2003.

Continued Public Outreach

The Assessment of US Government Activities to Combat Trafficking in Persons (June 2004) acknowledges a significant gap between the numbers of victims of trafficking in the United States and the number of victims which the US Government has been able to assist with immigration, protective and social services. The US Government is therefore placing the expansion of training and outreach at the center of its strategies to reach more victims.

The US Government has engaged in a number of activities in order to close the gap and increase outreach activity to victims. Some of these activities have proven to be very successful. These include a public information newsletter published by the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, launched in January 2004, and the Trafficking in

Persons and Worker Exploitation Task Force Complaint Line, launched in February 2000, a toll-free phone line which allows individuals to call in anonymous tips of suspected trafficking activity. Together with the Department of Justice's other outreach activities, the Complaint Line has provided invaluable assistance in the fight against trafficking. *Over half* of the investigations opened since February 2000 have been as a result of calls to the Complaint Line.

The US Government has also engaged in public awareness activities which directly target victims of trafficking, such as the recent US Department of Health and Human Services campaign entitled "*Look Beneath the Surface.*" This campaign is designed to encourage victims to come forward with their cases by using public service announcements and specialized victim targeted strategies including publications in non-English newspapers and religious media.

There remains a need for more proactive approaches to reach victims of trafficking which consist in large part of permeating the different communities where victims tend to congregate.

Commentary, Concerns and Recommendations

The Assessments of US Government Activities to Combat Trafficking in Persons of 2003 and 2004 provide analyses of these various activities and contain recommendations for subsequent action. I would like to comment on some of these recommendations. I would also like to include an additional concern, the use of the Internet as a modern day recruitment station and auction block for victims of trafficking.

1. The Importance of Victim Identification

In the winter of 2003-2004, The Protection Project conducted a training program of law enforcement officials in nine countries of Southeast Europe. Repeatedly, we spoke with heads of agencies that told us that they had received funding for shelters, but that the shelters remained unoccupied. "Where are the victims?" was a frequent refrain and one which elicited a lot of shaking of heads as well as looks of great consternation. Tentative answers included the fear and mistrust of anyone in authority; the absence of information on victims' rights and services, especially in the victims' own languages, and the fear of reprisal of the traffickers if the women seek assistance or accept to participate in legal proceedings.

In the United States, we find ourselves in a similar quandary. The total of victims served remains very small. Even one rescued life is worth the time, the effort and the funds. The challenge before us remains, however, can we not reach more? What are the obstacles in our way?

It is imperative that we keep the challenge of appropriately identifying victims of trafficking as a high priority on the national as well as international anti-trafficking agenda. The consequences of relegating this to a degree of lesser importance are serious:

- Without accurate and comprehensive victim identification, the sense of urgency required to combat trafficking in persons will diminish. The ability of our government to quantify modern day slavery has improved dramatically but it remains difficult to reconcile the numbers of men, women and children trafficked into the United States (currently estimated at between 14,500 and 17,500 annually) with the small numbers of victims served, the few letters of certification issued, and the limited numbers of T-Visas issued.

I am concerned that empty shelters and low service lists will eventually lead some to question the wisdom of these expenditures. This is the wrong approach. The correct approach is to identify and work with those groups having greatest access to trafficking populations in order to identify and serve victims of trafficking.

- Proper victim identification ensures rapid intervention. How accurately law enforcement officials, social service providers and Good Samaritans identify a trafficked person will determine how quickly this person is able to be released from bondage and obtain legal, social, financial, and medical assistance.
- Proper victim identification must include two main components: raising the level of understanding and knowledge within an entire community and conducting aggressive outreach into the indigenous neighborhoods where trafficking persons are likely to find refuge.

A recent instance in Montgomery County, Maryland, highlights the acute importance of community understanding. Rita, a young woman from India, was brought to this country by a high-ranking official of her country's embassy in order to work as a domestic servant and to receive an education in the United States. Instead, Rita found her life transformed into one of servitude and bondage, working long hours, receiving no compensation, and being held captive in the home with no access to the outside world. Her one outing a week was to church. Her master's chauffeur, who waited for her and escorted her home at the conclusion of the service, drove her there. Finally, one woman noticed this quiet girl who always sat in the back, who dressed in the same clothes, who talked to no one. Thanks to the intervention of one woman, and the subsequent support of the entire church community, Rita is now free from captivity.

2. The Need for Expanded Partnerships

The US Government alone cannot combat trafficking in persons on a scale sufficient to eradicate the problem. The non-profit sector in this country has a long and noble history of serving as both advocate and implementer of social change, and this role is being sustained in the fight against human trafficking.

An analysis of agencies that have been given federal funds in the past two years reveals some interesting trends. Community-based organizations have in fact received significant federal dollars. What is missing, however, is the representation, among grantees, of the faith-based community. While most of the organizations receiving federal funds in 2002 and 2003 for public outreach, service provision and technical assistance and training in the United States were community based organizations, in FY 2003, 2 out of 14 organizations which received funding from the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (HHS ORR) for domestic anti-trafficking work were faith-based organizations and two out of twelve organizations receiving anti-trafficking funds through the Department of Justice's Office of Victims of Crime were faith-based organizations. In FY 2002, only one faith-based organization received federal funding from ORR for providing services to victims of trafficking out of a total of 14 organizations that received funding. In summary, out of 40 grants awarded, 4 were to faith-based groups. It is important to note that, while the new federally funded public awareness campaign includes placing notices in religious media, faith-based groups are not yet significant recipients of federal anti-trafficking dollars.

I believe that this is an omission which deserves to be studied, analyzed and addressed because, by this omission, we are eliminating a group which can be a vital part of the solution we are all looking for.

As Protection Project staff have traveled around the world, we have noted an interesting phenomenon: faith based shelters are full. In the streets of Lima, Peru, a group of Catholic nuns walk the streets in one of the city's worst areas in order to get to know the girls and to let them know about their shelter. When the girls are ready to escape from the streets, they know where they can go for shelter, skill training, emotional support, physical care and, too frequently, child care for their babies. The girls stay three years. When they leave, they are provided with the means to establish themselves in a small business. Over 60 percent of the girls who pass through this center have remained off the streets.

In Limassol, Cyprus, a Russian Orthodox Priest succeeded in convincing his Bishop to donate a home in an affluent residential neighborhood to serve as a shelter for victims of trafficking. Fr. Savvas has mobilized his parishioners to recognize victims of trafficking. Individuals who worship in his church every week have rescued women who are then taken to his shelter.

These are but two examples of hundreds of small organizations that are filling a desperate need for aggressive outreach, compassionate care, and personal as well as cultural sensitivity to the population they are seeking to serve.

Based on observation and anecdotal evidence, I believe there are several reasons for the success of these organizations:

- They conduct active outreach into the communities where they know they will find victims. They make a point of getting to know individuals who

could be victims of trafficking, learning their names, establishing relationships, and informing them about the services they offer.

- They are trusted by the victims because they speak the same language and are often from the same cultural background.
- They allow for longer stays, often up to several years, thereby allowing for not only immediate recovery but also deep emotional healing. The symptoms of victims of trafficking are similar to those of victims of torture. They require time to recover from serial rape, abuse, and humiliation.
- Because the shelters have strong community ties, they are able to assist in the reintegration process much easier.

I believe that these claims are valid. However, further research is necessary to validate them, and this will be one of my final recommendations.

3. The Use and Abuse of the Internet: Recruitment Station and Auction Block

For many of us, the challenges of technology are limited to coordinating a Blackberry, a cell phone and a personal computer. Graduating to a more complex level would be the un-spamming of our in-boxes. But for many the new technologies, along with the concomitant ease and immediacy of access accompanied by the exhilaration of anonymity, have created a new kind of monster, turning the Internet into a new form of recruitment station and a modern day auction block.

In August 2000, Lindsay Lavoie was abducted from her Tampa, Florida home. Six months before, she had begun a relationship with a Greek man named Kon Baehring over the Internet. Thinking at first that he was her own age, Lindsay became completely enamored of her new friend and did not flinch when he revealed his true age of 35. They exchanged love letters via the Internet and the man proposed marriage. Baehring arranged a clandestine meeting on a day when Lindsay pleaded sick and stayed home from school. When Lindsay's mother returned from work, her daughter was gone. A police investigation revealed that she had been abducted and taken to Athens. When police entered Baehring's house, they found large amounts of pornography and evidence linking Baehring to a large cyber-conspiracy which was used to abduct a young and naïve woman from her family. In the home of one of the conspirators, more child pornography was found, including images of Lindsay Lavoie. The investigation revealed that Baehring had a history of seductions, or attempted seductions, using the Internet to establish relationships with young girls.

An increasingly troubling modern day phenomenon is the rise of on-line communities and their new function as auction block and recruitment station. On-line communities provide individuals, primarily young people, with instant access to thousands of "friends," including romantic partners, party buddies, or career networking possibilities. Newcomers create a personal profile which includes at least one photo and a personal profile of likes and dislikes, interests, dreams and other personal information.

The potential for pimps and traffickers is mind-boggling. Whereas finding girls used to involve time spent in the street or bar, buying drinks and driving from place to place, now all that is required is a session to a local computer, plugging in a zip code and asking for a listing of girls, 14-18, in a particular zip-code. It's a slave owner's paradise: Instant availability, the advantages of anonymity, and no accountability.

Not surprisingly, Internet icons are being used as vehicles to the flesh trade. On March 2 of this year, eBay Taiwan posted an announcement offering three young Vietnamese women for auction. The one caveat of the add that also offered to provide medical certificates attesting to the women's virginity was that the women were "for shipment only to Taiwan." Advocacy Groups were alerted to the ad, and demanded its immediate withdrawal. The request was immediately honored.

The challenges for Internet abuse are extensive and demand further research, investigation, and a public awareness campaign all its own. We have seen the ads for drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and tobacco abuse. It is now time to see ads for Internet abuse.

4. Need for Additional Research

Engaging in further research is necessary in order to successfully win the war against trafficking. We would like to recommend that further research be conducted in all of the areas we have addressed in this testimony, including the development of enhanced methods to identify victims of trafficking; the role of faith-based communities especially in areas of victim outreach, shelter, reintegration and restoration; and the implications of Internet abuse as it relates to human trafficking. Research in each of these areas will be in compliance with The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) which states, in Section 12A) that "The President... shall carry out research included by providing grants to nongovernmental organizations as well as to relevant United States Government Agencies and international organizations...Such research shall, to the maximum extent possible, include but not be limited to the following:

"(1) The economic causes and consequences of trafficking in persons."

"(2) The effectiveness of programs and initiatives funded by the Federal Government to prevent trafficking in persons and to assist victims of trafficking."

"(3) The interrelationship between trafficking in persons and global health risks."

5. Remember the American Girls

As my last recommendation, I would like to read a letter that I received from a woman we will call Mary. She wrote it after listening to me talk about the trafficking of foreign women into the US. I am quoting it to you exactly as it was sent to me.

Dear Michele:

I wanted to talk to you, to impress upon you that there are a lot of American women who are also in the same predicament [as women who are trafficked from overseas.] Pimps buy and sell women all the time, between themselves, the clients, etc. You can sell one white blonde girl in Mexico and get three Mexican girls in return. A girl who makes good money on the street can sell for \$10,000 or more to another pimp. Often, pimps make sure that they have sisters or friends, and split the girls up. If one acts up or tries to escape, the other will be punished.

I tell you these things from my own experience. I was bought and sold between men in the US. I am a white female, born here. My daughter was held hostage so that I could work. One year, I saw her for one day. My mother, who is now 77, was beaten several times because of me. I have seen many of my girlfriends killed. It is often easier to kill yourself than to know you will be tortured all night when you get home and are not able to sleep before you must go back to work. By torture, I mean beatings, strangling, being cut, thrown out of the windows, etc. I have been tossed out of a third story window. I have had 81 broken bones, including my nose being broken three times, my jaw fractured, my ribs have had 28 separate breaks. I have had my feet broken so that I could not leave.

The “houses” in Vegas are used by pimps to train girls they do not want to deal with. They take girls there for months at a time. The girls are not allowed to leave without the pimp coming to get her. When he does, the house gives him her cash. They cannot keep money on them in the room. They are let out for a week or two at a time, the pimp spends some time with her, buys her clothes and such. Then the pimp signs the girls back in for another stint.

I know that trafficking is bad from other countries. I used to know Chinese restaurants and massage parlors in Phoenix that would bring girls in who only spoke Chinese. They were allowed to see only Chinese men. They were not allowed to talk to anyone else. They are not allowed out and are locked up when the owner of the store leaves. There are no phones, no way to communicate. I know this because I used to know a Chinese motel owner and his wife who were friends with the owner. He was over often and the wife would tell me how sad she was for the girls. But she could not say anything because of her husband. It goes on.

Just please do not forget the American girls. There are girls here who have no one to turn to either. They are exploited, abused, and used. They are bought and sold and beaten or raped by men, even their own, daily.

They need you too.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to allow me to speak to you today.

