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*OPENING REMARKS

Human Trafficking is One of the Cruellest Realities in Our World

United States Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen **

According to the State Department, up to 27 million people around the world are victims of trafficking. Florida law rightly defines human trafficking as a form of modern day slavery. Though many seem to think that slavery is a thing of the past, the truth is that it's a pervasive reality in our world, and it often happens under our very nose – at the hotel, the local restaurant, and the hair salon. This crime robs victims of their basic dignity, depriving them of their fundamental liberties, and inflicts great harm on the victims, their families, and society.

This crime is also a global epidemic that demands our energetic commitment to liberate and protect those who are victimized and bring to justice those responsible. Tragically, women and girls are disproportionately affected by trafficking. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime found that on

· Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Chairman House Comm. on Foreign Affairs, Opening Remarks at the University of Miami National Security & Armed Conflict Law Review Symposium on Illicit Trafficking and National Security: How Central, South America and the Caribbean trafficking impacts Miami as a Gateway City (Feb. 28, 2014).

· Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen is the representative of Florida's 27th congressional district. She is Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Presently, she is the Chairman of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, and a member of the House Committee on Rules. In this role, she continues to be a voice of strong support for the state of Israel, for human rights around the globe, for trade agreements with our allies, and against the spread of Islamist extremism. As a strong advocate of programs that address domestic violence against women, Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen was a lead sponsor of the Violence Against Women's Act. She earned an Associate of Arts degree from Miami-Dade Community College in 1972, Bachelors and Master's Degrees in Education from Florida International University in 1975 and 1985 respectively, and a Doctorate in Education from the University of Miami in 2004.

· Remarks for Representative Ros-Lehtinen were delivered by Professor Dexter Lehtinen. Mr. Lehtinen is a former U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, former Organized Crime Strike Force prosecutor in Miami and former Assistant U.S. Attorney in Los Angeles. He is also a former State Senator in the Florida Senate and State Representative of the Florida House of Representatives, during which time he authored four Florida Constitutional Amendments. He earned an M.B.A. and an M.A. from Columbia University and was a Nathan Abbott Scholar at Stanford University Law School. Professor Lehtinen teaches Florida Constitutional Law at the University of Miami School of Law.

average, 55-65 percent of victims are women and 27 percent are minors. While much of the efforts to combat trafficking rightly focus on Europe, Asia, and Africa, this is also a major problem closer to home.

Latin America is a primary source region for people trafficked into the United States, and as the gateway to the Americas, Miami is a major entry point in this process. Because of this, the human trafficking epidemic particularly affects our South Florida community. Florida has one of the highest rates of human trafficking cases in the country. In 2011, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center ranked Florida third in the number of calls received by the center's hotline.

In our own community, local Miami International Airport is one of the top entry points for foreign victims of human trafficking entering into the U.S. Recognizing this problem, in March 2012 Miami International Airport became the first U.S. airport to implement anti-trafficking training. This training, provided by the local advocacy organization Kristi House, taught about 50 MIA employees how to identify suspected victims of human trafficking and respond appropriately. Hundreds more have been trained since then, and other airports throughout the U.S. have followed this model to combat trafficking in persons in their cities.

This past December, the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office successfully prosecuted what may be the first human trafficking criminal case in Florida since a new anti-trafficking law went into effect in 2012. This law is the Safe Harbor Act, which recognizes those who are trafficked as victims and ensures that they are treated as victims and not criminals. Also, Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi has been working with businesses to expand a "zero tolerance" campaign against human trafficking throughout the state. These efforts demonstrate three important elements in the fight against human trafficking. First, they show us that to make meaningful progress in combating this issue, we must tackle the problem from the highest levels and using all the resources we can marshal. Second, these efforts, particularly the "zero tolerance" campaign, send a clear message that the exploitation of others is an abhorrent crime that cannot be tolerated. And third, such efforts demonstrate that to adequately combat and ultimately eradicate human trafficking, there must be close and effective coordination across various levels of government and law enforcement officials.

We should be encouraged by these steps, as they are critical in the fight against human trafficking and they raise awareness in our community about this epidemic which too often goes unnoticed. In addition to working at the local level, we must look at our geographic context, where our Latin American and Caribbean neighbors have a responsibility to help combat this problem. Many of these are countries of origin, transit, and destination for human

trafficking activities.

It is estimated that between 17,500 to 20,000 victims are trafficked annually into the United States, and many of these come from Mexico and Central America. Several Latin American countries, including Venezuela, Honduras and Haiti, are on the Tier 2 Watch List of the State Department's Trafficking in Persons report of 2013. This means that they will be closely watched in the coming year and if their governments don't make significant progress, they will be dropped to Tier 3, which applies to those countries that are doing little to cooperate in the fight against trafficking. The only country in the region designated Tier 3 is Cuba, where the Castro dictatorship supports and even encourages the horrific sex tourism industry by exploiting women and children. This regime-sanctioned exploitation of the most vulnerable in Cuban society is yet another example showing that the Castro regime remains as brutal and callous as ever.

It is appalling but not surprising that Cuba is the only country in the region that is not a signatory to the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, which was adopted in 2000. Similarly, Cuba is the only country in the region that is not a signatory to the International Labor Organization Convention 182, on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. Such blatant disregard for universal standards of human rights and dignity are unacceptable, and placing Cuba and other countries in the Tier 3 category is one way of shaming them into action. This is why until the Cuban people enjoy a real democracy and the freedom to exercise their human rights, we must not ease U.S. policy toward Cuba.

In addition, the activities of criminal networks contribute significantly to human trafficking in the region. In Central America, drug cartels and gangs use narcotics routes to traffic individuals across borders. These criminals also coerce vulnerable young men and women into forced prostitution and trafficking, stealing their dignity, and in many cases their lives, in order to finance their illicit activities. For example, according to reports, last May, Ecuadorian police arrested six men for trafficking people from India and Sri Lanka to the port city of Guayaquil, from where they were taken through Central American into the U.S. Two of the suspects were immigration officials, who were accused of accepting money to facilitate the process. This demonstrates the appalling, but sadly not surprising, corruption that is prevalent in many of these countries and which contributes to human trafficking activities.

Too often those who are entrusted with protecting the weak and pursuing justice not only look the other way when confronted with cases of human trafficking, but are complicit in this sickening crime. This becomes a vicious cycle when rampant crime and inadequate law enforcement leads to a

general lack of security because this puts people in a vulnerable position where they are at greater risk of being trafficked. Some experts have also raised the possibility of terrorists groups, such as al-Qaeda, collaborating with criminal organizations in the region and turning to trafficking to fund their operations.

It's not all bad news, however. Many Latin American leaders have acknowledged this problem and they are taking steps to confront it. In 2012, eight countries passed anti-trafficking legislation and several others created national bodies and task forces dedicated to combating human trafficking. Also in 2012, there were more than 1,000 prosecutions of suspected traffickers and 402 convictions in Latin America, a significant increase from only five years ago. This willingness is the first step toward eradicating human trafficking, and we want to support this, not only because it's the right thing to do, but because as we have seen, this is a crime that enters our borders and affects us too.

In 2013, the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons provided \$19 million in funds to non-governmental organizations around the world, and of this amount, \$1.9 million went to NGOs in Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Mexico. In addition to assistance through foreign aid programs, the Department of Homeland Security is working with Mexican officials to identify, arrest, and prosecute human trafficking rings. These efforts are especially important as Mexican drug trafficking cartels become increasingly involved in the trafficking of persons.

There is also an important role for regional bodies, particularly the Organization of American States. Since 2005, the OAS has helped member states combat trafficking in persons through promoting anti-trafficking policies and providing opportunities for member states to share best practices. The OAS has also developed several training programs for various officials including parliamentarians, law enforcement personnel, migration officers, and consular and diplomatic representatives. By 2012, the OAS had trained over 1,000 judicial and law enforcement officers in Caribbean and Central American countries to help identify, prevent, and combat human trafficking.

In the U.S. Congress, I'm working to shine a light on this issue, both in Florida, our nation and around the world. Last year the Congress reauthorized the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, which is the U.S. government's most important tool in the fight against human trafficking. This bill provides resources to support law enforcement efforts against human trafficking, expand services for survivors, and help prevent this crime from happening in the first place. It also prevents U.S. foreign assistance from going to countries that use child soldiers, and through more rigorous compliance and reporting requirements, it helps ensure that our federal agencies do not support human trafficking around the globe.

In addition, this legislation also addresses this problem at the local level by authorizing the State Department to form partnerships to combat child trafficking through Child Protection Compacts. This would allow the U.S to partner with other countries to combat the exploitation of children for slave labor and commercial sex trafficking. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act represents the most significant action taken by Congress to address this appalling crime, and my colleagues and I are constantly evaluating ways to strengthen this law to make it more effective.

This is why I'm proud to co-sponsor H.R. 3344, the Fraudulent Overseas Recruitment and Trafficking Elimination Act of 2013. This bill incorporates important anti-trafficking and anti-slavery measures into our foreign assistance programs, and it also:

- Requires that prospective foreign workers be given accurate information about the terms of employment;
- Prohibits recruitment fees or hidden charges sometimes used as coercive leverage over workers;
- Requires foreign labor recruiters to register and remain in good standing with the Department of Labor; and
- Provides new incentives and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that recruiters and employers follow these disclosure and registration requirements.

While we are taking important steps toward ending this appalling crime, there remains much work to be done to eradicate this modern slavery. But the fundamental human desire for freedom is stronger still. I am committed to doing all that I can from my position as a Member of Congress to fight for human rights and dignity and to prioritize these values in our foreign policy.

Thank you.

