

## TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS AND WORKER EXPLOITATION TASK FORCE



### *Coming Together to Combat Modern-Day Slavery*

It is profoundly troubling that the problem of slavery continues into the new millennium. While we discuss this problem using such terms as trafficking and worker exploitation, we should make no mistake about it – we are talking about slavery in its modern manifestations. While some of the schemes and practices employed by traffickers reflect the sophistication of the modern world, others are basic and barbaric. Regardless of how sophisticated or simple trafficking enterprises may be, at bottom they all deny the essential humanity of the victims and turn them into objects for profit.

The federal government is working to combat this tragic problem. In 1998, the Attorney General ordered the creation of an interagency task force to focus on the problem of worker exploitation. The Trafficking in Persons and Worker Exploitation Task Force (TPWETF) is co-chaired by the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights and the Solicitor of Labor. This effort has brought a range of investigative and prosecutorial agencies to the table. U.S. Department of Justice components include the Civil Rights and Criminal Divisions, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), U.S. Attorneys' offices, the Office of Policy Development, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the Violence Against Women Office. U.S. Department of Labor components include the Office of the Solicitor, the Wage and Hour Division, and the Women's Bureau. Outside partners include the U.S. Departments of State and Agriculture, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). In addition, the TPWETF has created fifteen regional task forces, each of which has points of contacts from local U.S. Attorneys' offices, INS, the FBI, the Department of Labor, EEOC, and state and local law enforcement. The regional task force approach has allowed investigators and prosecutors to share information and coordinate their efforts. We believe that by pooling information, expertise, and resources and by using all of the legal authority available to these agencies, we can make a difference.

### *New Legislation, New Opportunities*

The recently enacted Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 established important new tools and resources to combat trafficking and to provide vital assistance to its victims. An Internet link to the new legislation can be found at [www.usdoj.gov/crt/crim/tpwETF.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/crim/tpwETF.htm). The law creates new felony criminal offenses to address slavery and peonage; sex trafficking in children; and the unlawful confiscation of a victim's passport or other identification documents. It creates a new "forced labor" felony that will provide federal law enforcement with the ability to prosecute the sophisticated forms of nonphysical coercion that traffickers use today to exploit their victims. And it requires traffickers to pay full restitution to victims and to forfeit their assets if convicted.

The new law also provides essential services and protections for trafficking victims. The law makes victims eligible for a broad array of federal benefits, requires procedures to ensure victims' safety and assistance while in the government's custody, and creates grants to develop programs to assist trafficking victims. Moreover, the new law makes such victims eligible for temporary nonimmigrant visas so that they can remain in the United States to help law enforcement in the prosecution of traffickers. The new law also requires that several federal agencies establish public awareness and information programs about trafficking and the protections that are available to victims. Traffickers who prey on vulnerable individuals shall be brought to justice, and victims of trafficking must be treated with dignity and afforded vital assistance and protection.

The U.S. Departments of Justice and Labor, co-chairs of the Trafficking in Persons and Worker Exploitation Task Force, have taken the lead in prosecuting trafficking and worker abuse cases, balancing the special needs of trafficking victims with swift punishment for traffickers. Some highlights:

- In April 1999, seven defendants were sentenced to jail and ordered to pay \$1 million in restitution for enslaving dozens of Mexican women and girls, some as young as fourteen, in brothel houses in Florida and the Carolinas, through beatings, rapes, and threats. The lead defendant was sentenced to fifteen years incarceration. Federal prosecutors and agents worked with an immigrant advocacy group to obtain shelter, clothing, and jobs for the victims, who have legal status and are working in Florida.
- In the spring of 1999, three defendants were convicted of slavery and immigration violations arising from their enslavement of Mexican and Guatemalan farmworkers in the agricultural fields of southern Florida through threats of force. The lead defendant received a sentence of three years incarceration. The victims received legal status and are working in Florida, where they participate in a farmworker advocacy group.
- In October 1999, three defendants were convicted for luring ten young women from their homes in China to Saipan, CNMI, where they were enslaved in a karaoke bar brothel and forced into prostitution through threats and beatings. The lead defendant received a sentence of nine years incarceration. Federal prosecutors and agents helped the victims obtain legal status, jobs, and housing.
- In January 2000, the Justice Department's Special Counsel for Immigration Related Unfair Employment Practices, the National Labor Relations Board, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission entered into settlement agreements with a Minnesota hotel, which had unlawfully retaliated against undocumented workers attempting to unionize. The INS subsequently granted the undocumented workers deferred action for two years.
- In May 2000, the federal government obtained convictions against four garment shop operators in Manhattan's Chinatown for lying to Department of Labor Wage and Hour investigators. The garment manufacturers, who engaged in widespread wage violations and kept several sets of records so as to deceive inspectors, were assessed criminal fines, ordered to pay back wages as restitution, and given probation.
- In the summer of 2000, a Nigerian couple was convicted of slavery and other offenses for holding a young girl as a domestic servant in their home in New York City. The defendants were sentenced to eleven years and twelve years incarceration and ordered to pay their victim over \$250,000 in restitution. The victim is living and working in New York.

To report a case of forced labor, call the Trafficking in Persons and Worker Exploitation Complaint Line

**1-888-428-7581**

*For more information, visit [www.usdoj.gov/crt/crim/tpwetf.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/crim/tpwetf.htm)*