

**Opening Statement  
Chairman Dan Burton  
Government Reform Committee  
Subcommittee on Human Rights & Wellness**

**“The Ongoing Tragedy of International Slavery and Human Trafficking: An  
Overview”**

**October 29, 2003**

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The Subcommittee is convening today to examine the atrocious practices of human trafficking and slavery around the world, and to discuss how the United States is attempting to combat these illicit practices on an international scale.

Although many people believe that slavery and human trafficking are no longer a major problem in modern times, it is estimated that more than 27 million cases of human trafficking occur every year. This figure represents the highest concentration of slaves in the entirety of human history, and the problem continues to grow.

Human slavery and trafficking is a worldwide crisis that affects 116 countries, including many industrialized and developed Nations like the United Kingdom and Australia. No country is immune from these illegal practices; however, every Nation needs to put into place strong measures to deter and prevent these crimes against humanity.

Sadly, human slavery and trafficking are booming businesses in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. According to figures released by the United States Department of State, it is estimated that human slaves contribute over \$(U.S.) 13 Billion every year to the global economy, \$(U.S.) 7 Billion of which is a direct result of the illicit sex trade alone.

Because of this crime’s enormous profitability, slaveholders will stop at nothing to traffic as many slaves as possible. Slaveholders trick and victimize innocent people into lifetimes of servitude by preying on the most economically disadvantaged members of society. These crimes lure hard-working men and women attempting to make a better

life for themselves and their loved ones. As soon as victims are deprived of the opportunity to return to their homes, they are forced into domestic servitude, sweatshop labor, prostitution, and other types of compulsory labor.

In addition to the millions of people who are coerced into slavery, there are many who spend most of their lives working to repay paltry debts at extreme rates of interest. According to a *National Geographic* article from the September 2003 issue, entitled, “*21<sup>st</sup> Century Slaves*,” two-thirds of the world’s captive laborers, 15 – 20 million people, are debt slaves in places such as India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. These indentured servants can spend whole lifetimes repaying debts as little as \$(U.S.) 36 because of outrageous rates of interest placed on loans. Sometimes, if the debt is large enough, it could take two or three generations of indentured family members to repay the loan. And the ever-increasing number of these economically disadvantaged individuals has created an even greater surplus of potential victims for slaveholders to exploit.

While the average cost of a slave centuries ago would equate to roughly \$(U.S.) 40,000 in today’s dollars, that same slave would sell for around \$(U.S.) 150. Because laborers are relatively cheap and easy to exploit, regard for the slaves’ lives has greatly diminished. Slaves are being held in the most inhumane of conditions. They are not given proper shelter, medical care, or nutrition, in addition to being continuously subject to savage beatings. In the eyes of modern-day slaveholders, slaves can literally be worked to death because the profits that they produce far outweigh the cost of keeping them alive.

Currently, the United States has measures in place to help combat trafficking in persons. On October 28, 2000, the President signed into law the “*Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000* (Public Law 106-386),” sponsored by my dear friend and colleague Representative Chris Smith of New Jersey, who will be joining us here today. His legislation has been very effective in combating human trafficking, and I believe that it is necessary for the House and Senate to reauthorize this most important bill as soon as possible to keep strong measures in place against human trafficking.

While the United States has enacted comprehensive laws to deal with the existing human trafficking situation, many countries have laws that are not germane to address the current problems associated with these illicit activities. More than 154 countries have laws in place that minimally target trafficking by prohibiting the procurement of women and children for purposes of prostitution and forced labor. Unfortunately, most of these laws do not address modern-day trafficking concerns, and are not thoroughly enforced due to the lack of proper funding and up-to-date training of law enforcement officials.

In an effort to assist in combating human trafficking on an international scale, the United States has provided financial and training assistance to less-developed countries that do not currently have the means to deter human trafficking violations. During Fiscal Year (FY) 2001 and 2002, the United States appropriated over \$100 Million for global anti-trafficking initiatives in over 50 countries to assist in the prevention and protection of trafficking victims, and to support and train international law enforcement officials.

The Honorable John Miller, a former colleague of mine who represented the 1<sup>st</sup> District of Washington from 1985-1993 and is currently the Director of the State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, is here with us to talk about his recent travels to observe firsthand the trafficking crisis going on in the world today. Congressman Miller will be joined by the Honorable Kent Hill, Assistant Administrator at the United States Agency for International Development, who will also testify on human slavery in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the United States government's efforts to put an end to human slavery and trafficking practices around the globe.

In addition to our government witnesses, the Subcommittee will also hear today from several experts in various forms of trafficking and slavery. They are here to assist us in gaining a better understanding into the current human trafficking crisis, and how best to counteract these crimes on a global level. I look forward to hearing their testimony.