

Interactive Thematic Dialogue of the U.N. General Assembly
“Taking collective action to end human trafficking”
Statement of the United States
May 13, 2009

The United States would like to thank the General Assembly President for convening this important Thematic Dialogue on Taking Collective Action to End Human Trafficking.

It is unfortunate that the reprehensible practice of treating fellow human beings as commodities continues unabated in this modern age. Traffickers know no bounds in the level of cruelty they are willing exert on vulnerable men, women and children for the purpose of making money.

Over the last several years, awareness about human trafficking has led to greater action by member states, international organizations, civil society and the general public.

We have seen over 150 pieces of new or amended legislation adopted by governments, including our own and from around the world, to toughen penalties for human trafficking. Additionally, our data shows that convictions of traffickers worldwide rose from 2,800 convictions in 2003 to 3,400 in 2007.

Yet, despite greater international attention, our national and collective efforts remain disjointed. Our own analysis suggests that labor trafficking prosecutions and convictions comprise only 10 percent of the total trafficking prosecutions globally. Those traffickers who are convicted of labor exploitation violations tend to receive only administrative sanctions. These perpetrators need to go to jail.

While attention has been focused on countering sex trafficking, assistance and protection of the victims remains weak. Often treated as criminals, many survivors are quickly deported or kept in detention centers without immediate access to needed care.

I want to be clear that the United States recognizes its own trafficking problem and we work hard to deal with it. Our attention was first drawn to the issue during the Clinton Administration. Indeed, when she was the First Lady, Secretary Clinton fully supported the coordination efforts of the President’s Inter-Agency Council on Women and promoted the trafficking issue during her extensive international

travels. And now, as Secretary of State, she chairs President Obama's Interagency Taskforce on Trafficking in Persons.

We have a strong legal framework to address trafficking. The US Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2000 and has amended the law three times – most recently last year-- to fine tune our efforts to effectively address the multidimensional aspects of trafficking, improve protection of victims, and strengthen our law enforcement response.

Since the enactment of our anti-trafficking law, we now have 42 multi-disciplinary task forces in approximately 25 states but the United States can still do better. We will continue to enhance our efforts to identify and assist victims, including domestic victims, and put traffickers in prison.

The United States is highly committed to effective multilateral cooperation to combat human trafficking. The United Nations and other key inter-governmental organizations and regional entities have played a significant role in confronting this multidimensional crime and human rights abuse.

The United States reviewed the Secretary General's Background Paper and we were pleased to see the number of responses by member states and other stakeholders offering thoughtful ideas for effective implementation of all legal instruments and strengthening international coordination efforts. Ultimately, as the Background Paper concludes, political will and determination to act are the essential ingredients for an effective response to trafficking in persons.

The focus of our discussions today is on one aspect of international coordination, a proposed global plan of action. The Background Paper included several comments on the need for this global framework but, in our opinion, it over-stated the depth of support. Last month at the first meeting of the Interim Working Group on Trafficking in Persons in Vienna, there was not unanimous agreement by the experts on the need for such a plan. Indeed, there was concern that this action plan would create a parallel process and divert attention away from priority implementation of the Trafficking Protocol and other existing mechanisms, and that it was premature or "too much, too soon."

The United States shares these concerns. We believe that the UN is already effectively leading the global fight against trafficking by advancing implementation of the Trafficking Protocol through the Conference of Parties to the Transnational Organized Crime Convention. Moreover, we are concerned that

launching labor-intensive negotiations for an Action Plan would absorb the limited resources available to the UN and Member States, especially for smaller governments.

The distinguished representative from Belarus mentioned in his remarks that the Global Plan of Action would bring in new partners from civil society and the private sector. It is unfortunate, however, that representatives from civil society and the private sector were not able to participate in today's interactive dialogue.

Before the United States can decide whether or not to join consensus in supporting a Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, we believe that several key questions would need to be addressed both collectively and by individual member states in the coming months. For example:

- How would the elaboration and subsequent implementation of the Global Plan of Action impact the existing work of UNODC? UNODC serves as the Secretariat to the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime. UNODC has also developed a number of useful informational tools for interested stakeholders and currently oversees 75 technical assistance projects around the world. We are concerned that UNODC's financial and personnel resources will be severely stretched if it must take on the significant responsibilities of coordinating the global plan of action.
- How would the Global Plan of Action complement implementation of the Trafficking Protocol and not compete with or diminish the primacy of the Conference of Parties of the Transnational Organized Crime Convention?
- At the state level, Member States would need to reflect on whether this Plan of Action will have any practical impact, and ultimately lead to greater vigor in their own national efforts to combat trafficking, especially for those Member States that have not acceded to the Trafficking Protocol. We urge those states that have not yet done so to consider ratification of the Protocol.
- And finally, how would the Global Plan of Action enhance existing regional plans of action? Again at the micro level, should a member state give priority to conforming its national efforts to those outlined in regional action plans – such as those of the OSCE, ASEAN, ECOWAS and soon OAS, or those of a more generalized global action plan? It would be useful to hear

from the representatives of these regional organizations on the challenges and successes of getting member states to implement such regional plans.

Additionally, we encourage UNODC to continue strengthening its coordination efforts with key inter-governmental organizations, particularly with the ILO, which has done impressive normative work on forced labor and stands to make additional progress in addressing labor trafficking, particularly that among transnational and contractual migrant workers. We look forward to reading their just-released global report titled “The cost of coercion.”

The Obama Administration looks forward to working with the UN and Member States in determining the best approach to accelerate international efforts to end the suffering of victims and put the traffickers where they belong... behind bars.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to take the floor.