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Human Trafficking in the United States

I have always been distressed at the lot of those who are victims of various kinds of human trafficking. How I wish that all of us would hear God's cry: "Where is your brother?" (Gen 4:9). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labour? Let us not look the other way. -- Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium

Background: The United States is a source, transit and destination country for men, women and children. Both U.S. citizens and foreign nationals are subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor, including domestic servitude. Trafficking in the U.S. occurs in both legal and illicit industries, including escort services, brothels, strip clubs, agriculture, manufacturing, construction, health and elder care, and domestic service. The top countries of origin of federally identified victims in 2014 were the United States, Mexico, the Philippines, Thailand, Honduras, Guatemala, India, and El Salvador.¹ Particularly vulnerable U.S. citizen populations include foster care, runaway, and homeless youth, Native American women and girls, and U.S. citizen and undocumented children of migrant farm workers. Foreign nationals who have entered the U.S. both with and without legal status have been identified as trafficking victims and come from a variety of industries which include participants in visa programs for temporary workers.

U.S. Government Response: The U.S. federal government has been a leader in addressing human trafficking. Through the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA)² (and subsequent reauthorizations in 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2013), the U.S. has developed a legal mechanism for implementing trafficking prevention mechanisms, law enforcement, legal protections, and victim support services. For identification and prosecution purposes, the U.S. federal government uses the definition of severe forms of trafficking in persons found in the TVPA:

- Sex Trafficking:** the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or

- Labor Trafficking:** the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.³

U.S. Catholic Bishop's Response to Human Trafficking The bishops of the U.S. and Mexico have specifically spoken out on the issue of human trafficking, calling upon their governments to work together to apprehend traffickers and destroy trafficking networks. In 2003 the Bishops, in their

¹ United States Trafficking In Persons Report 2014, United States Department of State, USA profile, at 397 (June 2014) available at

http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2014/?utm_source=NEW+RESOURCE:+Trafficking+in+Persons+R

² Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-386

³ 22 U.S.C. § 7102(9)

joint pastoral statement, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, state that “both governments must vigilantly seek to end trafficking in human persons. . . Together, both governments should more effectively share information on trafficking operations and should engage in joint action to apprehend and prosecute traffickers.”⁴

The U.S. Catholic bishops’ recently testified before Congress on their anti-trafficking work and stated: “In our mission to eradicate modern day slavery and minister to the survivors, we [the Bishops] have consistently served survivors and helped them to rehabilitate, grounding our service to this vulnerable population in the article of faith that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and therefore are imbued with fundamental dignity.”⁵

USCCB’s Role in Combatting Human Trafficking in the U.S. USCCB has made the elimination of trafficking a priority. Efforts include (1) awareness-raising and outreach, (2) protection and provision of services to trafficking survivors, and (3) public advocacy. By virtue of its organizational structure and geographical reach the U.S. Catholic Church has assumed a strong leadership position and played a critical role in the American anti-trafficking movement.

USCCB and its partner organizations, particularly Catholic Charities, have provided support services to both adult and child victims of trafficking, including mental health services, employment assistance, English-language training, counseling, housing and other material assistance needs. From 2005-2011, USCCB and its partners provided intensive case management services to victims of trafficking, assisting more than 2,232 survivors of trafficking and over 500 of their family members. USCCB continues to work with a national network of refugee foster care programs to provide a new life for child survivors of human trafficking and frequently provides consultation regarding potential child trafficking for the Department of Health and Human Services.

USCCB currently assists the federal government in complying with the requirements of the 2008 TVPA by helping to screen all children crossing the border as potential trafficking victims. USCCB has held informational sessions on the identification and screening of trafficking victims to Border Patrol and Customs and Border Patrol officers. The information sessions have helped increase knowledge and awareness about trafficking among law enforcement personnel and are a stellar example of government and Church collaboration.

USCCB works on public advocacy initiatives related to ending human trafficking. Part of this effort is driven by the Catholic Coalition against Human Trafficking (CCOHT), which consists of Catholic organizations which convene quarterly and work together on anti-trafficking advocacy and public outreach. In recent years, USCCB has supported initiatives to help promote transparent and slavery-free supply chains as well as efforts to eliminate illegal foreign labor recruitment fees which can place individuals in situations of debt bondage.

The current Congress has indicated interest in passing legislation aimed at ending human trafficking, with specific focus on aiding child trafficking victims, domestic victims, and victims of sex trafficking. USCCB will continue to work with this Congress on anti-trafficking initiatives.

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⁴ Catholic Bishops of the United States and Mexico, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope* (Washington DC: USCCB 2003), no. 91.

⁵Testimony of Nathalie Lummert, Director of Special Programs for MRS, before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations *Effective Accountability: Tier Rankings in the Fight Against Human Trafficking* April 29, 2014 available at <http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/upload/Trafficking-TIP-Report-Testimony-FINALAP.pdf>