



TESTIMONY
U.S. SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGIES FOR ERADICATING SLAVERY
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee and share the views of Free the Slaves. I would like to take this opportunity express our gratitude to Senator Coker and Senator Cardin for their outstanding leadership and commitment to addressing human trafficking. It is very heartening to know that the leaders of this Committee, as well as other members, have devoted strenuous effort to ensuring the United States is the leader in the global effort to address the tragedy of modern slavery.

I returned from India on Sunday, where Free the Slaves has an extensive program. Over the last sixteen years, Free the Slaves has implemented anti-trafficking programs in eight countries, including our current programs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Haiti, India and Nepal.

Human trafficking, which is slavery, inflicts a vast toll of human suffering. At Free the Slaves, we are daily witness to the ruthless exploitation of slavery: girls and women victimized by sex trafficking; little boys on fishing boats; young girls trapped as household servants; women breaking rocks by hand in a stone quarry; men sent down primitive mine shafts in search of gold and the coltan that ends up in our cell phones; and, entire families locked up in brick kilns. I have seen all of these with my own eyes and know the devastation wreaked on individuals, families and communities.

While acknowledging that dreadful reality, my message today is one of hope and optimism. I believe that we now have the potential to achieve radical reductions in slavery if the Congress and the next President act boldly. The anti-slavery movement has galvanized global acknowledgment of the persistence of slavery. Three complementary approaches to eradicating slavery have evolved, with substantial gains in experience and evidence, though there is still much to be learned. The Congress and the next President must now focus on scaling up approaches pioneered by the anti-slavery organizations so that the effort to eradicate slavery is commensurate with the magnitude of the problem.

We have specific recommendations for Congress on which I will elaborate. These include dramatically increasing resources, investing strategically and consistently, fully implementing the USAID C-TIP policy, leveraging the resources of the multilateral development banks, consistency in our diplomacy and investing in research and evaluation.

The early phase of the modern anti-slavery movement was dedicated to sounding the alarm and alerting the world that the ancient curse of slavery persisted, notwithstanding formal legal abolition in most of the world. That goal has been largely accomplished, with widespread acknowledgment that slavery exists. I am proud to say that Free the Slaves played a critical role in this global awakening.



In the second phase of the anti-slavery movement, three complementary, mutually reinforcing approaches have emerged. These are the supply chain approach, the criminal justice approach and the community-based approach. While organizations tend to specialize, many, such as Free the Slaves, implement a combined approach.

The goal of the supply chain approach is to choke off the demand for slavery-tainted goods. It focuses primarily on the links within international trade, tracing slavery-tainted goods from producer to retailer to consumer. It relies largely, though not exclusively, on name and shame tactics and evolving business norms that make it untenable for complicit or negligent businesses to sell goods made by slaves. The recent exposition of slavery in the fishing industry is a good example of this approach. We commend the Congress and the Administration for closing a legal loophole that allowed such behavior to go unregulated.

The criminal justice approach primarily looks at slavery through the prism of investigation, arrest and prosecution. Slavery is a crime in every nation on earth. In practice, however, the risks to slaveholders and traffickers are negligible while the rewards are high. Only a tiny fraction of criminals are ever brought to justice. The goal of the criminal justice approach is to end impunity for predators and create disincentives through swift, certain and severe punishment. This approach is often accompanied by hotlines that allow for reporting of suspected crimes and trigger support for victims, as well as safe harbor statutes that exempt slavery victims from prosecution for crimes committed under the coercion of slavery.

The third approach, which is the primary strategy of Free the Slaves, focuses on eradicating slavery at its source by dramatically reducing the supply of highly vulnerable laborers on whom traffickers prey. Our **Community Based Abolition Model** is based on a simple and irrefutable premise: Slavery cannot be meaningfully addressed without empowering the people and communities preyed upon by traffickers. Demand reduction and law enforcement are critical. But the necessary third leg of the proverbial stool is ensuring that potential victims and survivors can aggressively assert their right to be free. Policies and strategies that do not place at-risk communities at the center of their own struggle to live free will fail.

Moreover, the communities at risk have clear markers. Slavery is not randomly distributed. Slavery stems from specific vulnerabilities in identifiable, high-risk communities. Its victims come very disproportionately from the hamlets and villages of south and southeast Asia and west and central Africa. These communities are typically rural, impoverished and made up of stigmatized and marginalized groups, compounded by severe gender inequities. They are characterized by low understanding of their legal rights, weakness or absence of protective community organizations, deficits of legal protection, and poor access to basic social services. Understanding the root causes of slavery also provides the path to its eradication.

I can best illustrate this point by recounting an experience from India. My colleagues and I entered a tiny hamlet in northern India. The villagers were members of a low caste group. The dwellings were made of cow dung, mud and thatch and had dirt floors. Running water and sanitation were unknown. There was no school for the children and almost no access to health care. Their meager possessions consisted of a few tools, some hand-made cots, some chickens and a water buffalo.

Every member of the community supposedly owed debts to the landlord on whose property they lived. The typical path to slavery is that an impoverished family encounters a moment of crisis, most often illness in the family. Debts are incurred to pay for health care or other



emergency needs. In the absence of cash, the creditor demands free labor. Lies, ruses, coercion and violence are used to hold people on the farm, in the mine or in a factory. The entire family is held liable for the debt, which is passed down from one generation to the next. Children grow up knowing nothing but enslavement.

To speak to the people in the community, we were obliged to hide in the nearby forest. We were told that the villagers would be beaten if the landlord or his agents saw them speaking to us. One man said to me, “My father was a slave. I was born a slave. I don’t want to be a slave anymore.” This was a slave village.

Predators will always be able to exploit villages such as the one I described unless the underlying vulnerabilities are addressed. Over the past sixteen years, we have developed and refined a **Community Based Abolition Model** that replaces vulnerabilities with assets so that communities become highly resistant to slavery and trafficking.

The first essential step is building the capacity of local agencies and organizations to protect at risk communities. Our experience is that there are usually dedicated organizations that have intimate knowledge of the communities and close ties to the population. However, they are invariably under-funded and need training, technical assistance and organizational development. Hence, Free the Slaves always partners with local organizations to build sustained local capacity to fight slavery.

The Free the Slaves **Community Based Abolition Model** is built on four mutually reinforcing pillars that address the core vulnerabilities that underlie slavery: educating and mobilizing vulnerable communities, enhancing legal protections, increasing access to essential services and liberating and reintegrating slavery survivors. All the work is carried out with and through local partners who understand the context and are trusted in the communities.

1. Educating and mobilizing vulnerable communities: Slavery stems in part from gaps in knowledge and unchallenged assumptions about social norms. Lack of understanding of rights under law leaves people open to exploitation; e.g., in India, debt bondage is often accepted as an obligation without understanding it is illegal and a crime. In Nepal, insufficient education about safe migration strategies and tactics leaves people open to the manipulations of sex and labor traffickers. Engrained attitudes and norms about caste leave ancient social hierarchies in place, which are then used to hold workers in subservience. Gender discrimination facilitates the exploitation of women and girls, including trafficking. These knowledge, attitude and behavior gaps are compounded by the absence or weakness of community-based organizations that serve to protect the community from exploiters and predators.

Accordingly, the first pillar of the Free the Slaves model is to engage highly vulnerable communities in participatory learning, so that knowledge is gained, attitudes shift and new, protective behaviors emerge. This is accompanied by the development of anti-slavery committees that serve as a neighborhood watch – a trained and organized group that organizes the community, monitors risks, advises community members and serves as the community’s advocate with police and other government authorities.

This process of educating and mobilizing communities can be enormously powerful and was perhaps best captured by the man in a rural Haitian village who said, “We were in the dark,



now we are in the light.”

2. Enhancing legal protections: The persistence of slavery reflects a failure of the rule of law, including weak penalties for the crime, denial of access to basic civil rights and protections for women and discriminatory access to entitlement programs, whether for prevention or as restitution for survivors.

In response, Free the Slaves and its partners mobilize advocacy with government authorities and build the capacity of the responsible government agencies to undertake their responsibilities. We work with coalitions of anti-slavery and human rights organizations to strengthen law and law enforcement. For example, we support the Alliance Against Trafficking in Women and Children in Nepal (AATWIN), Aba Sistem Restavek (Down with Child Slavery) in Haiti and catalyzed the creation of an advocacy coalition, COSCAE, in eastern Congo.

We encourage the community anti-slavery committees to be vigorous advocates with local governments, demanding law enforcement and creating a political voice for bonded laborers and other trafficking victims. This is often a huge step for communities that have been historically alienated from their own local governments.

We support our partners in training police and other government officials, so that they are better able to enforce the law. We also train journalists on slavery, so that their reporting can cast a spotlight on neglect and complicity by local authorities.

3. Increasing access to basic social and economic services: While poverty alone does not explain slavery, the conditions of poverty render households more vulnerable to predators. Children who are out of school are more likely to end up in slavery. Families that lack access to basic, affordable health care will experience a financial crisis coping with illness. Loan sharks exploit the absence of legitimate sources of credit and put families in debt bondage. In the absence of even very modest savings, income generation alternatives or social safety nets, families can be thrown into crisis by the inevitable vicissitudes of life. Free the Slaves and its partners help connect vulnerable communities and families to these core services of schooling, health, credit and income generation. Doing so reduces the risk of trafficking and enslavement.

4. Liberating and reintegrating slaves: The process of community empowerment leads to the rescue, liberation and reintegration of those in slavery. As partners work with communities and communities become emboldened, cases of slavery, whether of individuals or groups, are uncovered. This sets up a chain of events leading to self-liberation through community resistance, appeals to government authorities or raids that free slaves from work places and brothels. Because resistance has developed at the community level, the syndrome of replacing liberated slaves with the newly enslaved is avoided. Hence, we believe that the appropriate focus for planning and measurement is the community.

As liberation occurs, Free the Slaves and its partners work with communities and other service providers to ensure that slavery survivors receive the support they need to reclaim lives of freedom and become fully reintegrated into their communities and families. For example, we support a shelter in India that provides care for women and girls victimized by sex trafficking and a self-help network of survivors in Nepal.



The liberation process also leads to legal action against perpetrators, including arrests, convictions and civil action to compensate victims.

The triumphs of survivors are inspiring. I think of people like Ravi Kumar in India, who was born a bonded laborer and is now a lawyer advocating for the rights of other survivors.

We know the Free the Slaves **Community-Based Abolition Model** is effective. Our work has led to the liberation of well over 11,000 slaves. The 2015 data are still being compiled. In 2014, our collaboration with partners reached 1,977 villages, where more than 82,500 people were educated to protect themselves and their families from traffickers. Almost 1,300 government officials were trained on how to fight slavery. The collaboration with partners led to the arrest of 163 alleged traffickers and slaveholders. We did this on a budget of about \$3.2 million.

An independent evaluation of our program in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was funded in part by the State Department Trafficking in Person Office (J/TIP) concluded, **“(The) results clearly demonstrate that the project led to increased community-led resistance to slavery in eastern DR Congo mining zones.”**

We take great pride in what has been accomplished with the resources available to us.

The power of the Community Based Abolition Model was crystallized for me when I visited the village of Sakdouri in northern India. Sakdouri is a village where 52 men, women and children had been rescued from slavery in a brick-making factory. One year later, the villagers were earning a living from farming, children were going to school, they were getting health care and new homes had been built. They said, “We know what happened to us and why. We know how to protect ourselves. No one will ever make slaves of us again.” They were going to surrounding villages and educating others about how to protect themselves.

When we got up to leave, the villagers said, “No, you can’t leave yet, we have to sing you our freedom song.” So they took out their instruments and here is what they sang, *“We are not afraid. We do not fear sticks or guns or slave owners. We know our rights. We keep our rights. We will achieve our destiny.”*

Ladies and gentlemen, this is what we seek – to have every village and neighborhood afflicted by slavery rise up and sing its own song of freedom.

The anti-slavery movement has now accumulated a substantial body of experience and evidence as to how to fight slavery. Eliminate demand for slave made goods. Make the perpetration of slavery a high-risk business. Cut off the supply of highly vulnerable workers in at-risk communities. Support survivors.

There is, of course, much more to be learned and the movement would benefit from additional investments in research. But the foundation has been laid for effective action against slavery.

The most important barrier to progress against slavery is the diminutive scale of the response to a great global crime against humanity. Without entering into the fruitless debate about the exact number of slaves in the world, every estimate points to tens of millions affected. We frequently see entire villages and hamlets that are in thrall to slaveholders.



According to the International Labor Organization, traffickers and slaveholders are pocketing a \$150 billion per year from their exploitation of people.

It must be candidly acknowledged that the scale of the response to slavery has been a tiny fraction of the benefits to traffickers. The anti-slavery movement is fighting a raging elephant with a popgun. We have the experience and the knowledge to make a difference, but not the resources or political support to deploy our tools and methods. This is a great tragedy and deeply frustrating for my staff, our partners and me. We are holding a vaccine that could immunize villages against slavery but cannot deploy it.

The time has come for the third phase of the anti-slavery movement, which is going to scale. We must match the nobility of our intentions and words with the actions and resources that will change the lives of millions.

With that in mind, we propose the following policy agenda for the Foreign Relations:

- **Dramatically increase resources:** There is no escaping the fact that only a qualitative leap in available resources will allow for the necessary scaling up. Investing two cents – just two cents! – in fighting slavery for every dollar that the traffickers put in their pockets would be a huge gain in the resources to support the organizations fighting slavery. This would give heart to the afflicted communities and instill fear in the traffickers. The End Modern Slavery Initiative would be a very strong beginning down this path of increased commitment.
- **Invest consistently and wisely:** There is no quick fix to slavery. It will require tenacity. Funds should be allocated strategically and over the long term in the countries most afflicted by slavery. The programs should sustain support for a comprehensive approach that combines supply chain, criminal justice and community-based strategies.
- **Fully implement the USAID Counter-Trafficking in Persons Policy:** We applaud USAID's C-TIP policy. However, it is hard to obtain information on the implementation of this policy. We suggest that this Committee would be well served to require regular, publically available reporting by USAID on the implementation of the C-TIP policy. We bring to the attention of the Committee that USAID issued one RFA on human trafficking in 2015 and has issued two RFIs in 2016; human trafficking is not included in USAID's 2016 Mission Competitive Forecast, posted February 8th.
- **Leverage the resources of the multilateral development banks:** Almost by definition, the development banks are supporting large-scale programs that reach into the communities where slavery is prevalent. However, they neither see nor act upon the slavery in their midst, which is a huge missed opportunity. To our knowledge, slavery reduction is not even on the agenda of the multilateral development banks. At modest cost, poverty alleviation programs could integrate an anti-slavery component so that they would both detect slavery and know how to respond.
- **Consistently include slavery on the agenda at the highest levels of diplomatic discourse.** Everyone expects the TIP Ambassador to advocate for strenuous anti-trafficking efforts whenever he or she is in dialogue with the foreign governments. It's quite another matter when the Secretary of State or President raises the issue at the highest levels. This high level diplomacy is an effective strategy and should reflect our core values. An unimpeachable Trafficking in Persons Report should undergird our diplomatic



efforts to eradicate slavery. To that end, the J/TIP office should be ensconced in a structure and culture that is fully supportive of its Congressionally mandated mission.

- **Invest in context-specific research to guide policy and program design:** Good policies and programs depend upon research that elucidates that the magnitude and dynamics of slavery in specific contexts. Investing in evaluation is also essential to learning and accountability. Our experience has been a demand for accountability and assessment, without investing in the requisite analyses.

Slavery eradication would be enormously advanced by this combination of measures, all of which are eminently feasible. They would allow for the scaling up of anti-slavery interventions, which is the essential challenge over the coming years. An agenda for change exists. We must now choose whether to pursue this agenda.

I have spent more than 33 years working on issues of global health, poverty alleviation and social justice. That experience has left me an optimist, largely because of the incredible power of the United States in the service of a great moral purpose. Over the least thirty years, child mortality has plummeted, maternal mortality has been dramatically reduced, anti-retrovirals have stemmed the HIV pandemic and incredible progress has been made against dreadful, insidious tropical disease. These and other fundamental changes have helped hundreds of millions people live healthier, safer, more prosperous lives.

The leadership role of the United States in these changes is undeniable and of incalculable importance. The Congress, successive Administrations and the American people should take great pride in the investments and sacrifices that have made the world a better place. So I have a profound faith borne of experience in the ability of my country to be a force for good in the world.

I believe that the radical reduction of slavery is a cause worthy of our nation and resonant with our history. This cause is not too hard for us if we are tenacious in its pursuit and build upon what has been learned.

The next President of the United States, whoever that might be, will have the opportunity to become the Great Emancipator of the 21st century by asserting US leadership and galvanizing global action against slavery. This would be an enduring legacy. I am confident that this assertion of leadership in the struggle against slavery would have the support of the American people. There is no better place than the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to create a political environment conducive to bold action. It can do so by supporting an audacious agenda, such as the one I have suggested.

Let me close on a personal note. My wife is a direct descendant of the Lovejoy family, who were very prominent abolitionists in the pre-Civil War era; Owen Lovejoy served in Congress and was a fierce advocate of slavery abolition. My grandfather, a jeweler and watchmaker by profession, survived Auschwitz as a slave laborer, repairing that which had been stolen by the Nazis. I think our forebears would be surprised to see me testifying before this Committee, with slavery still a pressing issue. I like to think that they would also be gratified that the testimony of their lives, as advocates and survivor, continues to resonate. My most fervent wish is that your grandchildren and mine have a very different discussion, looking back on an evil that we helped eradicate.

Thank you for your kind attention.