

Combating Trafficking in Persons: an interdisciplinary field of work

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Hello everyone,

I am glad to be here with you this morning. Thank you David, as always, for inviting me!

It is Monday morning, after Easter, so I am not going to throw at you complicated legal definitions on trafficking in persons in the United States.

But I will talk about the work of The Protection Project and show you how the field of trafficking in persons, or better, combating trafficking in persons, is very much **an inter-disciplinary field**, one that requires a:

- legal,
- economic,
- political,
- scientific,
- cultural, and
- health approach

And this is very important to notice because, when the anti-trafficking movement began in the United States, some may say as early as the late 80s early 90s, but I'd say with the official passage of the Trafficking Victim Protection Act of 2000, this inter-disciplinary approach in the US administration was not contemplated.

When the TVPA was passed, in fact, it was mainly focused on trafficking in women and few US agencies were in charge of the anti-trafficking work.

But then the law was amended (or reauthorized) 4 times: in 2003, 2005, 2008 and March 7, 2013 as an amendment to the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)

Each reauthorization saw a gradual expansion of the scope of the law and of the number of agencies dealing with the problem:

- 2003 Reauthorization Act: → included the right to compensation of victims
- 2005 Reauthorization Act → included the issue of demand, which includes the issue of (Child sex tourism) and now the Act requires that the TIP Report asks countries about demand reduction programs.
- 2008 Reauthorization Act → includes the issue of Extra-territoriality → following the war in Iraq exploitation by US troops on Iraqi territory, it was decided that a government contractor exploiting people abroad shall be subject to the TVPA. Also, the 2008 act gave the Secretary of State the authority not to issue A-3 visas for a foreign mission or international organizations that have tolerated abuse of domestic workers by one of its diplomats
- 2013 Reauthorization Act:
 - it prohibits the distribution of U.S. foreign aid to countries using child soldiers and,
 - very importantly, it enforces stringent compliance and reporting requirements of federal agencies to ensure that the U.S. government is not spending taxpayer money to perpetuate human trafficking around the world
 - also, it provides invaluable resources for the provision of specialist services for survivors of human trafficking, grants prosecutors new tools to go after the traffickers who exploit others, and enhances partnerships with focus countries to protect children and prevent child trafficking.

What is so important about this legislative history of the TVPA is:

1. Firstly, the fact that it keeps being reauthorized, even in difficult economic times, it means that there is a wide consensus among the politicians and the people in the UN on the need to combat this crime;
2. Secondly, that there has been a gradual realization on the part of the administration that, to understand and tackle trafficking, you have to adopt a really comprehensive approach.

I was really glad to read in the President's Inter-Agency Task force April 2014 report on trafficking that, in the last year so many more initiatives in the US and abroad have been launched that, in a certain sense, change the way trafficking was dealt with in the past.

This is because new agencies have been involved strategically in the anti-trafficking efforts and new very creative projects launched. I'll give you just a few examples:

- 1) the US State Department Health and Human Services **HHS**, has released **new guidance to child welfare system and runaway homeless youth programs** on how to strengthen identification and service responses to child trafficking
- 2) The Department of labor (DOL) assisted human trafficking victims to gain **restitution for their labor by computing back wages and liquidated damages**

3) Department of Homeland Security (**DHS**) has agreed with five airlines in the **Blue Lightning Initiative a training module and pocket guide** that educates airline employees on how to identify human trafficking in airports and how to notify law enforcement.

These are just a few examples that show how the approach is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, new actors are brought on board and new strategies are being developed.

And this is, on a slightly smaller scale, what we try to do at The Protection Project. We divide our work in 6 areas of work, all of which address trafficking from one angle or another:

- Clinical Legal Education
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Legal Reform
- Promotion of Religious Dialogue
- Enhancing Capacity of Civil Society
- Human Rights Education

1. Clinical Legal Education:

- establish clinics in the Middle East that work on trafficking cases

2. Corporate Social Responsibility

- Teach CSR at universities Middle East (Beirut Arab University) on CSR and include trafficking in curricula across the region
- Hold annual conference on CSR in the Middle East and address labor exploitation and trafficking

3. Legal Reform

- Consult with governments on drafting anti-trafficking laws
- Draft model legislation on child protection
- Work with Kuwait – Philippines to write reports and encourage agreements for protection of the rights of migrant domestic workers

4. Promotion of Religious Dialogue

- Program in Jordan and Lebanon with Muslim and Christian maronites religious leaders

5. Enhancing Capacity of Civil Society

- Work with NGOs to raise awareness on trafficking
- Organize Annual Conference on Trafficking: this year, Best Practices.

6. Human Rights Education

- Association of Scholars in Trafficking in Persons
- Teach trafficking in persons at universities

All this does not mean, however, that the fight against trafficking is over and that we can sit back and relax.

Trafficking still exists and is still on the rise. I would just like to share with you a few challenges that I have noticed talking to experts to fighting trafficking in the US and especially abroad:

1) **Firstly, the lack of appropriate resources:**

- Despite the reauthorizations and the passage of new laws around the world, we still need to devote more resources to the implementation of the law, especially PROSECUTION;

2) The second problem is the **lack of data:**

- the data and the statistics we have today is still confusing. And sometimes we confuse cases of commercial sexual exploitation with prostitution;

3) the third problem is that **we do not treat all the cases of trafficking in the same manner**

- We still focus on sex trafficking more than on labor trafficking;

4) the fourth problem is **Corruption**

- Especially in developing countries, the problem of corruption among government officials and police officers makes the fight against trafficking an impossible task.

I believe these are some of the challenges of the future of the anti-trafficking field.

At The Protection Project, with research and development programs, we are trying to address these problems, but I hope some of you will decide to join us and fight with us this terrible crime.

Thank you.