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## Remarks at the 2016 Trafficking In Persons Report Ceremony

Remarks  
John Kerry  
Secretary of State  
Ben Franklin Room  
Washington, DC  
June 30, 2016

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**AMBASSADOR COPPEDGE:** Thank you, everyone, for being here today. That was quite a reception, and on behalf of the heroes and the Secretary, thank you for that.

Just some brief notes on our program: The Secretary is going to make some remarks. We're going to honor our wonderful heroes this year. We have nine heroes from eight countries. One of them will make some brief remarks and then I will do the closing. And after that, you'll be able to pick up your much-anticipated copies of the 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report. So, thank you for coming.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for raising issues pertaining to human trafficking year-round and for supporting the Trafficking in Persons Office here at the State Department. It's a real honor to work with you and it's a real honor that this issue has such a strong champion who raises it in his diplomatic efforts around the world.

With that, Secretary of State John Kerry. (Applause.)

**SECRETARY KERRY:** Susan, thank you very, very much. Welcome, everybody, to this annual event. It'll be my last one, but not the least important I think in many ways, because it represents a continuum and an awful lot of work that is done by a lot of people.

Susan – I am particularly proud of the work that she has done in leading this initiative. She's all in. And she was a prosecutor before she came to the State Department, and I asked her to take on this task with my own prosecutorial experience in the back of my head. I was – early in my career I spent a number of years as a prosecutor, started a rape counseling initiative and a priority prosecution unit, and particularly focused on personal crimes against people, which we prioritized in a very significant way. So I remember how difficult the job can be and how tough it is for people to come forward and talk about very personal things in a very public way – not easy. The pressure can be intense, but it was clear to me that Susan came with a particular level of commitment and understanding. And I think we've all benefited from that.

Her very first human trafficking trial led to the conviction of more than a dozen criminals who were forcing teenagers into prostitution. And all told, she successfully prosecuted nearly 50 human traffickers, helping more than 90 victims obtain justice. And I think that's a remarkable record, and we are very grateful in the State Department to have somebody who is so committed and tenacious in leading our efforts on human trafficking, because that is exactly what we need. I know you will join me in saying thank you to Susan and the entire team that has produced this document. Thank you. (Applause.)

Very happy to welcome all of you to the Ben Franklin Room here this morning. I am particularly grateful and happy to welcome the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Bob Corker, and the ranking member, Ben Cardin, two of whom are just unbelievably strong, committed leaders on this subject. This is a truly bipartisan effort and I hope both of you – Ben, Bob, thank you. (Applause.) They both understand that there are just no partisan lines on this one, and they have been particularly committed to helping to eradicate human trafficking. And I'm very grateful to them for being here.

I'm also grateful to all of your excellencies, members of the Diplomatic Corps who are here – many ambassadors, which underscores the importance of this issue. And I want to welcome those of you from the private sector and from civil society. You are indispensable partners in this effort.

And finally, a very special thank you to our team at State. This is a great document, and I was presented with an embossed copy – I have one each of the years that I've been here in my office, proudly displayed. And I'm very grateful for having gotten my recent copy today.

But this is a heck of a piece of work. There's a lot of information in here; a lot of studious work goes into thinking it through. There are some tough calls – in the end, they come down to element of discretion – but not much, because we have a fixed set of rules that Congress has created, and we follow those rules. And therefore there are some folks in here who will obviously be concerned about the conclusions, but the conclusions are based on facts and based on a lot of analysis over a year.

So I'm very grateful to our team that doesn't just put this together in the last weeks. The work on next year's report has already begun, because it's a period that goes from April 1st to March 31st, and so we're already been – beginning to collect and build on the information we gained in the prior year, and work with countries – I want to say that to any country that evaluates this and says, "Well, why am I here?" Well, we work with these countries. I've made personally plenty of phone calls to my counterpart foreign ministers, to prime ministers, to presidents, and said, "Look, you're not cruising in the right direction here, and we need to start to move." And we send people to work with those countries, and our embassies are deeply engaged in helping to promote transformation.

So it is thanks to everybody, an all-hands-on-deck full team effort, that this document comes out. And it's not an insignificant document.

The tier rankings that I have designated reflect our department's best assessment of a government's efforts to eliminate human trafficking. They don't take into account political and other factors. As I say, they're based on a criteria. And in addition to the rankings, the report outlines our specific concerns as well as the ways we can improve our efforts. This is not meant to be a dunning report; it is meant to be a demarcation, an encouragement process, a process of evaluation and work towards changing rankings.

And as this is now the 16th report of the State Department, and one of the things that I have found is that we can always become more effective in fighting trafficking by working with the true experts, and those experts are sitting here. Those experts are also all of the survivors.

Last December, President Obama appointed an Advisory Council on Human Trafficking, giving survivors a direct line to offer recommendations and guidance on our strategy. And I've had the chance to meet with members of this council – some of whom are here today – and I know that every aspect of what we do – including in this report – is stronger because of the engagement of these folks.

Now, make no mistake, my friends, as we gather here – a beautiful day, couple days before our national celebration of July 4th: When we talk about “human trafficking,” we're talking about slavery – modern-day slavery that still today claims more than 20 million victims on any given time.

And all 20 million are people just like everybody here. They have names. They have or had families in many cases. And they are enforced to endure a hell – a living hell in modern times that no human being should ever have to experience.

In some places – particularly where violent extremists are able to find a contemporary safe haven – and I might add, a temporary safe haven – the atrocities are both rampant and overt. A 34-year-old survivor recalls approaching one of her captors in Syria, a member of the terrorist group Daesh. She pleaded with him to halt the incessant rape of a 12-year-old girl, telling the terrorist, “She's just a little girl.” And he replied, “No. She's not a little girl. She's a slave.”

Modern slavery doesn't happen only in warzones. It exists in areas of both darkness and plain sight of people all over the world – even at sea.

You may be familiar with the story of Lang Long, who left Cambodia on the promise of a construction job in Thailand. It was supposed to help him and his family, and he had dreams of providing – being the provider for his family. But on arriving in Thailand, Long was forced to work on a fishing vessel. He was beaten regularly with a metal pole, compelled to drink water from fish barrels, allowed little rest. And when he wasn't working, he was chained by a rusty metal collar around his neck to an anchor post, so that he couldn't escape. It wasn't until a Cambodian fisherman saw him and paid \$750 to secure his release that the shackles were undone.

Long's story was brought to the wider world by Ian Urbina of *The New York Times*, a reporter who is here with us today, and I thank him for providing us with this gut-wrenching insight into

what is happening in terms of slavery. But this story, I regret to tell you, is far from unique. The fact is that there are many, many stories similar to this, where unscrupulous fishermen use the isolation of the sea to hide their crimes. Enslaved crew members – most of whom are under 17 years of age – they're forced to work 18-to-20-hour days. They're denied medical care, they're force-fed amphetamines to help them work through the pain.

And the reasons aren't hard to figure out. When criminals are able to turn a profit in an illegal fishing market, they'll go after as many fish as possible. So they also not only destroy lives of human beings, but they destroy an ecosystem. And the more labor they have on board, the larger their catches will be. The economic incentives are there, which is precisely why illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing practices have grown into a \$20 billion a year industry. And that's why stopping those practices is going to be a major focus of the oceans conference that I will be hosting here at the State Department on September 15th. A global, coordinated effort is desperately needed and long overdue. And let me tell you something – with the help of the Senate, Bob Corker, and Ben Cardin and others, that is exactly what we intend to do.

Now it's clear that there are a lot of challenges in terms of exposing labor abuses that take place off our coasts. But these crimes can be just as hard to detect when they're happening behind closed doors – the closed doors of an exploiter's home.

Consider the case of Paul, who was 14 when he left Nigeria to move in with a British-Nigerian couple living in the UK. They promised his family that they were going to look after him, enroll him in school, pay him to help him with the housework. But guess what? They just lied. They didn't send him to school. They didn't pay him a penny. Instead, they took away his passport, monitored his movements with security cameras, and forced him to work 17-hour days as a servant. He tried to escape, but it wasn't until he had been living with the couple in this state of fear and intimidation and deprivation of papers and inability to move that he finally was able to work his way out of it 24 years later. He heard a report on the radio about an NGO that was fighting to eradicate modern-day slavery. That's the difference these efforts make. And summoning his courage, he bravely reached out to the organization, and they helped get him his life back and see that his tormentors were prosecuted.

Now, often, victims of domestic servitude enter into these dangerous situations willingly, lured by the false promises of money and a better life. And there are lots of places in the world today where a better life looks very enticing and you're willing to take a risk. So they remain enslaved in part because they are convinced by their captors that they have no way out, nowhere to go, and absolutely no one to help them.

That's one of the reasons why the State Department and the global law firm DLA Piper have gotten together to increase the availability of pro-bono legal services and other tools to combat trafficking. And today, we are pleased to announce the release of two documents which our teams have developed: The first is a model contract for domestic workers to use with their employers, and the second is a memorandum of understanding between countries sending and welcoming migrant domestic workers, setting forth clear standards for those workers' protection. Both documents are based on international law and both are designed to prevent the abuses in domestic work.

My friends, this is the 21st century. We know that human civilization has had thousands of years to develop and make progress and establish rules, and discern the difference between right and wrong. And we are part of a community of nations proudly, particularly, that lives by and advocates for and believes in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Frankly, it's stunning, it's outrageous that even today, the magnitude of the human trafficking challenge cannot be overstated. We all know the sad litany. Girls compelled into sex slavery. Women, sleeping in closets, let out only to cook, wash clothes, and scrub floors. Men and boys, forced to forgo sleep and to – and sustenance so that they can work around the clock, often in blistering heat or otherwise appalling conditions.

And the good news is we have the ability to fight back and, believe me, we are determined to do so. This is reflected in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which include an unprecedented commitment to halt human trafficking. It is reflecting in the Palermo Protocol, ratified by nearly 170 nations, and aimed at preventing, suppressing, and punishing these despicable crimes. And it is reflected in the steadily increasing efforts to cooperate and share information among law enforcement authorities on every continent. It is reflected in efforts by the media to cast a spotlight on the shadowy areas where traffickers exist and thrive. And it is reflected in a growing network of NGOs and advocacy groups who work hard every single day to bring modern-day slavery to a permanent end.

Assisting all of these efforts is what our annual report is all about. It is not, as I said earlier, just a catalogue of abuses. It is a detailed analysis of the challenges that we face. It's a targeted roadmap to measure how we can better overcome the challenges. And it is a clarion call – to each of us, to everybody in the world – to do all we can to eradicate these horrors and to hold – hold countries accountable to a higher and better standard of behavior.

As has become our custom in recent years, we are very privileged to highlight the work of a few of the men and women who have committed their lives – not one day, but their lives to combating human trafficking – and these are our 2016 TIP Report Heroes. So it is with great pride that we honor them today, and I ask Ambassador Coppedge to join me up here as we pay a tribute and hopefully inspire people around the world to understand why this is so important. Thank you. (Applause.)

**AMBASSADOR COPPEDGE:** Thank you, Secretary Kerry. You're truly an inspiration to us, from your days securing rights for victims as a prosecutor to your days championing anti-trafficking efforts here at the State Department. We really appreciate and are honored to have you here today.

I would now like to ask each TIP Report Hero to stand up when his or her country is called out.

The Bahamas. (Applause). In recognition of her role as the driving force behind the trafficking in persons inter-ministry committee of the Bahamas, her leadership in implementing the country's national action plan on human trafficking, and her commitment to training those likely to come into contact with victims of human trafficking, Karen Rigby. (Applause.)

**SECRETARY KERRY:** I'm going to ask Senator Cardin to --

**AMBASSADOR COPPEDGE:** Sure, lovely.

**SECRETARY KERRY:** Senator Cardin – Senator Corker, Senator Cardin – is Senator Cardin still here?

**AMBASSADOR COPPEDGE:** Senator Cardin --

**SECRETARY KERRY:** Senator Corker, why don't you come up, join us up here and – thanks, appreciate it.

**AMBASSADOR COPPEDGE:** And from Botswana – (applause) – in recognition of her vital contribution to the implementation of anti-trafficking legislation in Botswana, her steadfast commitment to enhancing law enforcement and judicial awareness, understanding of human trafficking, and bringing prosecutions in Botswana, her dedication to a victim-centered approach in those prosecutions, Priscilla Israel. (Applause.)

And from the Republic of Cyprus – (applause) – in recognition of her dynamic leadership as the head of the police anti-trafficking unit in the Republic of Cyprus, her passion for and commitment to the protection of victims throughout the prosecution process, and her devotion to the fight against human trafficking, Rita Superman. (Applause.)

We have two heroes from Mauritania. Please stand up. (Applause.) In recognition of their steadfast resolve in confronting hereditary and modern forms of slavery in Mauritania, their dynamic partnership to effect positive change, and their courage to insist on justice for the most vulnerable in their country, we recognize these two heroes. First, Biram Dah Abeid – (applause) – and second, Brahim Ramdhane. (Applause.)

Thank you.

From Nepal – (applause) – in recognition of her outstanding leadership in investigating cases of human trafficking in Nepal, her dedication to educating vulnerable groups about human trafficking, and her tenacity in enabling the prosecution of members of organized crime networks perpetrating this crime, Kiran Bajracharya. (Applause.) I told Kiran the State Department should give out medals too. (Laughter.) She looks really wonderful.

From Pakistan – (applause) –

**SECRETARY KERRY:** We do, actually.

**AMBASSADOR COPPEDGE:** I just don't have any. (Laughter.) In recognition of her unwavering advocacy on behalf of victims of bonded labor in Pakistan, her courage in providing aid and protection to those she has helped to free, and her commitment to helping them rebuild their lives, Syeda Ghulam Fatima. (Applause.)

From Russia – (applause) – in recognition of his steadfast commitment to assist Nigerian and other African victims of sex trafficking in Russia, his dedication to their comprehensive care, and

his persistent engagement with members of the anti-trafficking community to further protect and repatriate victims of human trafficking, Oluremi Banwo Kehinde. (Applause.)

And from Senegal – (applause) – in recognition of his selfless dedication to protecting talibes, young boys in Senegal, his commitment to providing them comprehensive care, and his vital role in building support among local officials to prevent human trafficking, Issa Kouyate. (Applause.)

I'm pleased now to introduce Rita Superman, head of the police anti-trafficking unit in the Republic of Cyprus. She'll make remarks on behalf of all of the heroes. (Applause.)

**MS SUPERMAN:** Thank you, Secretary Kerry. On behalf of all the 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report Heroes, I want to thank you, Secretary Kerry, for this honor. (Applause.) I really strive to find the words to express the deep gratitude and appreciation that I and the rest of the heroes feel for this great honor. This day truly marks a defining moment in our lives which we have devoted to combating human trafficking and protecting its victims. Some years ago I could not have imagined that one day I would be receiving the title of hero. I realize that trafficking is like an ocean: peaceful and inviting, only to trap you in a storm where its victims are sucked down to the dark ocean floor, lost forever and hopelessly waiting for a miracle to surface.

Soon after starting as head of the police and the trafficking unit in Cyprus, I realized the huge responsibility I put on my shoulders: the fight to free and support victims and work towards achieving the maximum punishment for the perpetrators. I cannot even imagine where Irina from Moldova would be had we not freed her from the criminal network that forced her into prostitution in a cabaret a few years back. She was only 20 years old. She had come to Cyprus believing she had earned a scholarship. She was instead forced into sex trafficking. We hid her, but they were looking for her. We changed her name and she went to university. When the trial started, she was threatened that she would be sent back to her country in a coffin. Unfortunately, the defendants were acquitted. This did not make Irina any less of a victim. Today, she has completed her studies and works for an international company. (Applause.)

Also, I cannot imagine the state of mind of Charideen from the Dominican Republic if she had not been freed. What would happen if she continued to be coerced to continue in prostitution day in and day out so she would not miss any client? I cannot imagine what would happen to Pham from Vietnam, whose arm was amputated due to the very poor working conditions in the agricultural industry and who spent a whole year in a hospital because of this injury. He was then arrested as an illegal immigrant and only at that time came the recognition that he was a victim. Pham was a classic victim of labor trafficking.

My fellow heroes and I could tell you hundreds of stories like this, stories that have left a mark not only on our careers but also on our lives – stories of human pain. From these stories and also from the cruelty and greed of the traffickers, I learn not only to place myself in the shoes of the victims, but also to walk in them. We can all do more to make sure that we truly understand the experience of victims so that we can protect them.

In a recent trial where I was a witness, the lawyer of the defendants ask me, “This girl went to McDonald’s every day for food. She could have sat down in the middle of the street and start

screaming for help. Couldn't she have done this, Mrs. Superman?" I replied, "In your logic, she could. In hers, she couldn't."

So we need to stop judging the victims by our own logic. We need to rid ourselves of our prejudices. Let's try and start to understand them and place ourselves in their situation. Only then we can truly help. Thank you. (Applause.)

**AMBASSADOR COPPEDGE:** Thank you, Rita Superman. You have a truly fitting name for a Trafficking-In-Person Hero. (Laughter.)

In the dark world of human trafficking, these brave men and women are rays of light, and thank you for shining on us today. (Applause.) They are a source of hope for countless trafficking victims and a source of inspiration for all who strive to make the world a more humane place. That is why I'm honored to share the stage with these individuals. Just as our heroes come from diverse regions and professions, the world needs anti-trafficking solutions that cross borders and industry sectors. None of us can end human trafficking alone. We need each other. Partnerships between NGOs, international institutions, and religious organizations – all of which are here today – galvanize the fight to end human trafficking.

In my time as Ambassador, I have witnessed the power of collaboration in these actions. I recently participated in the Vatican Summit on Human Trafficking, which focused on improving our legal systems by emphasizing humanitarian values and eradicating corruption. The summit explored the need for victim-supported services instead of punishments for crimes committed under duress. While Pope Francis has a unique ability to gather and rally diverse groups, leaders across communities – businesses, governments, and NGOs – can likewise demonstrate the power of collaboration in fighting the scourge of modern slavery.

The United Nations is also coordinating approaches to combat trafficking. In a historic session on human trafficking in situations of armed conflict, the UN Security Council called upon member-states to bring justice to those who exploit others, proactively identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, and comprehensively address victims' needs. The Security Council meeting was bolstered by the brave and harrowing testimony of Nadia Murad, who escaped from slavery after ISIL attacked her village.

Although Nadia's testimony and that of others like her exposes the human capacity for cruelty, I remain optimistic about the future – optimistic that the world is more interconnected and proactive in fighting human trafficking than ever before; optimistic that with help, survivors can move beyond this heinous crime; and optimistic that so many individuals here in the United States and around the world are united in combating modern slavery.

While the challenges are daunting, we cannot forget that optimism is a job requirement for all of us who work in this arena. We join you in encouraging continued progress across prosecution, protection, and prevention of this crime, and look towards increased international cooperation and a new generation of heroes to keep our faith in humanity alive. Thank you all for coming today. (Applause.)