

Remarks by
U.S. Ambassador John M. Koenig
Opening of the Civil Society Exchange & Networking
Seminar on Trafficking in Human Beings
KISA Cultural Center, Nicosia, Cyprus
October 21, 2013

Thank you very much. It is really a pleasure for me to be here tonight and I would like to say thank you to all those people from KISA and from the Turkish Cypriot Human Rights Foundation who worked with our Bicomunal Support Program to organize today's event and the conference that will begin tomorrow. I would also like to thank all of you who came from far away. I know there are a good number of international participants.

I was very impressed to see you here and happy that we could help to make the arrangements to allow you to come and take part in this event. I am also very pleased that the event is being held here in this wonderful space that has recently been renovated and now is available to all the various communities of people – migrants and others who are living here in Cyprus – who support the causes that are so important to KISA.

The U.S. Government and the U.S. Embassy in Nicosia have been cooperating for years now with KISA and with the Turkish Cypriot Human Rights Foundation in an effort to combat the scourge of trafficking in human beings, which regrettably is a problem here in Cyprus as it is elsewhere in the world – almost universally.

We can now look to these two organizations on either side of this divided island as close partners with whom we want to work more closely but also have a chance, we hope, to build a network of people who are working together in order to protect particularly the victims of trafficking in persons to, first of all, rescue them from the situation they find themselves and also to insure that they are treated properly and with respect and that the perpetrators of the crimes against them are prosecuted. They should not have to fear being re-victimized, as so often happens, when the victim's interests are not taken into account.

For some years, the United States' Department of State has had an office to monitor and combat trafficking in person and this is a very important step that reflects the

very, very high level commitment in the United States to combat trafficking in persons but also demonstrates that we believe that this is an area in which international partnerships are absolutely critical for success.

The man who leads this office, a fellow named Luis CdeBaca, is not only unusual because of his name, which I think comes from New Mexico, but he is also unusual in the strength, and absolutely burning devotion that he brings to this issue. I dealt with his office back when he was leading the effort against trafficking in persons on behalf of the Department of Justice and now he has been with the Department of State going on four years and he has done an absolutely phenomenal job coordinating our efforts and cooperating with countries around the world in order to combat trafficking.

Ambassador CdeBaca has said that diplomats like me – and I think a lot of people – use the term human trafficking or trafficking in persons as a euphemism because we are uncomfortable with the idea of the word "slavery". But, in fact, what we are talking about is modern day slavery – the same kind of outrageous crime that existed in the past. We in the United States recently celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation that freed the slaves. However, that does not mean we are done with our problem of trafficking in persons or slavery even in the United States. We are very much appreciative of the seriousness of this problem worldwide and the need to collaborate in order to combat it.

President Obama took a leading role in commemorating important anniversary of 150 years since our great President Abraham Lincoln – perhaps our greatest president – signed the Emancipation Proclamation. In that event a year ago he said with regard to the situation in our own country that we should really just call this by its real name – modern slavery. Modern slavery is a crime that threatens the rule of law. It feeds on the vulnerability of marginalized populations and creates further instability. It tears apart families and communities. It corrupts labor markets and the global supply chain. It degrades and depraves victims, not only in sex trafficking – which has received a great deal of international attention in the media – but in labor trafficking and other kinds of extortionate labor arrangements. It is a moral obscenity that we continue to allow modern slavery to exist on this planet today.

All of us know that these are huge challenges for all of us. And governments cannot do this alone. They cannot do the job of combating trafficking in persons or modern day slavery by themselves. It requires close coordination with NGOs and private sector contributions. It requires close work with the media to get the message out. And within governments, we need a whole-of-government approach that insures that all the elements of the government work together – law enforcement, social services, the immigration service, the court system – all of these people need to work with their social partners and NGOs, but also with each other.

This two-day conference is devoted to our efforts to renew, develop, and strengthen networking, exchanges and cooperation between NGOs in both the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities working on combating human trafficking, as well as bolstering the relationship between Cypriot NGOs and international anti-trafficking organizations working in source and transit countries. I am also pleased to note that there is someone here from IOM which has a critical role to play in this field of work. Such a network would provide an invaluable resource to all of Cyprus as well as source/transit countries regarding victim identification, victim services, protection, prosecution, and safe repatriation.

We in the United States don't claim to have all the answers. We face serious challenges at home. There are many stories about forced labor and sex slavery in the United States, so we realize that this is a problem that all of us face in our home markets. But we are committed and remain vigilant in combating modern day slavery, including in cooperation with our partners abroad. Combating human trafficking is a Mission Strategic Goal for Embassy Nicosia – for the Embassy I lead – as it is, I think, for every Embassy around the world. There is really no place where this is not a strategic goal for our diplomatic missions. We can offer support in numerous ways to improve prevention, protection and prosecution. However, this requires a joint effort so that the victim of a trafficking crime is not then again a victim through faults of the system or neglect.

I know considerable efforts have been made to ensure that the coming two days are going to be productive and enjoyable for all of you and I really hope they will turn out to be as rewarding as they promise to be. I wish you the best of luck and a very successful conference. I look forward to hearing from Juliette Dickstein and

from my other colleagues here about the fruits of this conference, about the ideas that you develop and the work that you suggest and want to do together and we will stand ready to help in any way that we can to bolster are joint efforts combat this scourge of the 21st century. Thank you very much.

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