

Chairman Deborah Pryce
House Financial Services Committee
Subcommittee on Domestic and International Monetary Policy
Statement for Hearing on “Combating Trafficking in Persons:
Status Report on Domestic and International Developments”
April 28, 2005

I'd like to begin by welcoming my distinguished colleagues and our expert panel to this hearing.

The topic we have before us today in this Subcommittee is wrought with emotion. It yanks at the heart strings. Because it's about real people. More often than not it's about young people – girls and boys. It's about innocent children, women, and men who are stripped of their dignity and robbed of their human rights. It's slavery. Today, in the 21st century, it's Trafficking in Persons.

Trafficking in Persons, or TIP as the State Department calls it, is a term used in U.S. law and around the world. The term encompasses slave trading and modern-day slavery in all its forms.

It only takes a brief history lesson to jog our memories that President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 commenced the effort to end slavery. Two years later, by way of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution and the subsequent ratification of the amendment by the legislatures on December 18, 1885, a ban on slavery and involuntary servitude was enacted in the United States.

We should all be shocked and horrified that 140 years later, slavery is still rampant in America.

As I've been learning more and more about the reality that is Trafficking in Persons, I have found myself naturally sharing what I learn with friends, family members, and colleagues. To those of you in this room who have been working on this issue for a long time, I'm sure you have shared this same experience. People quite simply have no idea that slavery still exists.

They have no idea that somewhere between 14,500 and 17,500 children, women, and men are trafficked across U.S. borders every year. They are astounded to learn that between 600,000 and 800,000 children, women, and men are trafficked across international borders every year. But, the numbers aren't enough. They don't mean a thing until you give each number a name, a face, an age, an identity.

Let me tell you about one. Her name is Aurica. She is 19 years old and from the country of Moldova, the poorest country in Europe between the Ukraine and Romania.

I met Aurica when I traveled overseas earlier this month on an investigative mission to address trafficking in persons in Europe. Aurica had just arrived at a rehabilitation center run by a non-governmental organization in Moldova's capitol.

Like any typical young woman, Aurica just wanted to make a life for herself. She wanted to get a job, provide for herself, and one day have a family of her own. But, Moldova's lack of natural resources and dismal economy is making it terribly difficult for young people to carve out a hopeful future. It also makes itself a breeding ground for traffickers.

Aurica became friendly with a young man, who told her about an exciting job opportunity in Turkey. Her spirits lifted when he told her about the money she could make – she may even earn enough to send some home to her parents in Moldova. The alternative, finding a job in Moldova that paid a decent wage, was a non-starter in this ambitious and realistic young woman's eyes.

However, upon her arrival in Istanbul, Aurica was immediately sold to a brothel owner.

After coming to the devastating realization that she would be forced to stay in the brothel with the other women who had been held there as sex slaves, she attempted to escape by jumping from the sixth story of the building. Sadly, she incurred significant injuries in her attempt to escape.

Aurica is one girl. She is one of thousands and thousands. In an ideal world, we'd be out rescuing every last victim of trafficking. But, we don't live in an ideal world so we must do what we can. We did what we could for Aurica.

Each and every day, non-governmental organizations across the world are doing what they can to help innocent victims of this horrendous practice. Governments across the world are on notice thanks to the annual TIP report Ambassador Miller's office puts out. And the U.S. is lending support across the globe to help provide other countries with tools to combat trafficking inside their borders.

The scale of this issue is almost incalculable. But we have to start somewhere, and we have. Congress, under the strong leadership of Mr. Frank Wolf of Virginia and Mr. Chris Smith of New Jersey, among many others, has enacted critical legislation such as the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and the PROTECT Act.

Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney and I will be introducing legislation later this week that focuses on ending demand for sex trafficking here in the United States. But, more needs to be done. We must continue to build awareness about this crisis and identify new and improved ways to combat it. It is multi-dimensional, complex, and ever-changing. And that is why we must continue the fight.

I'd like to close by quoting what I believe to be an incredibly powerful statement articulated by President Bush before the UN General Assembly in September of 2003.

The President said, and I quote, "there's a special evil in the abuse and exploitation of the most innocent and vulnerable. The victims of sex trade see little of life before they see the very worst of life—an underground of brutality and lonely fear."

I commend the leader of this great nation for his commitment to unleashing the forces to fight this special evil. Only by building awareness that this abuse exists, enacting and implementing sound policies to combat this abuse, and insuring the availability of support for victims of this abuse, can we truly invoke real change in communities all across this country and in communities throughout the world.

Thank you again to all of our panelists for joining us this morning. I look forward to hearing from our panelists their assessment of the current dynamics surrounding trafficking in persons both in the U.S. and abroad.

I'd like to now acknowledge the gentlewoman from New York, Mrs. Carolyn Maloney, who has been a great champion and partner in this fight against trafficking.