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On the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2003

President Bush on Friday signed important legislation that will authorize more than \$200 million across the federal government to combat the practice of human trafficking – including women and children forced into prostitution. The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2003 (TVPRA) renews the U.S. government's commitment to identify and assist victims exploited for labor or sex in the United States and worldwide.

As President Bush declared before the United Nations General Assembly in September, “Nearly two centuries after the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, and more than a century after slavery was officially ended, the trade in human beings for any purpose must not be allowed to thrive in our time.”

The TVPRA is a decisive step toward meeting the President's challenge. It provides fresh resources and initiatives to assist, in particular, the 18,000 - 20,000 victims of human trafficking who are trafficked into the United States every year. It augments the legal tools which can be used against traffickers by empowering victims to bring federal civil suits against traffickers for actual and punitive damages, and by including sex trafficking and forced labor as offenses under the Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organization statute. It also encourages the nation's 21,000 state and local law enforcement agencies to participate in the detection and investigation of human trafficking cases.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has a significant role in implementing the law's victim-centered, compassionate approach to finding and aiding the victims of this modern-day slave trade. HHS is launching a major public awareness campaign, targeted at local officials and service providers most likely to encounter victims, to find, rescue and restore victims to a humane condition of life. HHS welcomes the additional authority this Act provides to assist victims from the moment of detection.

A bedrock principle of this legislation is that victims of trafficking in the U.S. (who likely are not legal aliens and may be involved in illegal practices such as prostitution) are not perpetrators of crime – they are the victims of crime, and they ought to be allowed to rebuild their lives by staying here in the United States.

By signing the reauthorization of the federal human trafficking program, the President is reaffirming his Administration's commitment to end the horror of human trafficking, and to ensure that the real criminals – the traffickers of innocent people – are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

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