

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release January 10, 2005

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT

AT SIGNING OF H.R. 972,

TRAFFICKING VICTIMS PROTECTION REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2005

Room 350, Eisenhower Executive Office Building

1:33 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. I appreciate you all being here. In a moment I'll have the honor of signing the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act.

Human trafficking is an offense against human dignity, a crime in which human beings, many of them teenagers and young children, are bought and sold and often sexually abused by violent criminals. Our nation is determined to fight and end this modern form of slavery. And this bipartisan bill will help expand our efforts to combat this brutal crime that steals innocence and destroys lives.

I want to thank the members of the United States Congress who have joined me here. I appreciate Senator Sam Brownback; Chris Smith, Deborah Pryce, and Carolyn Maloney for their hard work on this important legislation. (Applause.) I appreciate the Secretary of State who has joined us here. (Applause.) And the Attorney General, Al Gonzales. (Applause.) And his wife.

In today's world, too often human traffickers abuse the trust of children and expose them to the worst of life at a young age. It takes a perverse form of evil to exploit and hurt those vulnerable members of society. Human traffickers operate with greed and without conscience, treating their victims as nothing more than goods and commodities for sale to the highest bidder. In recent years, hundreds of thousands of people around the world have been trafficked against their will, across international boundaries, and many have been forced into sexual servitude. Thousands of teenagers and young girls are trafficked into the United States every year. They're held hostage. They're forced to submit to unspeakable evil. America has a particular duty to fight this horror because human trafficking is an affront to the defining promise of our country.

We're attacking this problem aggressively. Over the past four years, the Department of Homeland Security has taken new measures to protect children from sexual predators, as well as pornography and prostitution rings. The Department of Health and Human Services has partnered with faith-based and community organizations to form anti-trafficking coalitions in 17 major cities across our country. The Department of Justice has more than tripled the number of cases brought against these traffickers.

The bill I sign today will help us to continue to investigate and prosecute traffickers and provide new grants to state and local law enforcement. Yet, we cannot put the criminals out of business until we also confront the problem of demand. Those who pay for the chance to sexually abuse children and teenage girls must be held to account. (Applause.) So we'll investigate and prosecute the customers, the unscrupulous adults who prey on the young and the innocent.

We also have a duty to reach out to victims of trafficking, some of whom were smuggled into this country as children. The legislation I sign today will help us provide important new services to these victims, including appointing a guardian for young victims and providing access to residential treatment facilities to help victims get a chance at a better life.

We'll continue to call on other nations to take action against trafficking within their own borders. Three years ago, at the United Nations, I asked other governments to pass laws making human trafficking a crime. Since then, many have risen to the challenge. Secretary Rice and I will continue to press the others to rise to the challenge. We are working with the nations of Southeast Asia and others to crack down on sex tourism. America is a compassionate and decent nation, and we will not tolerate an industry that preys on the young and the vulnerable. The trade in human beings continues in our time and we are called by conscience and compassion to bring this cruel practice to an end.

For those of you who have worked on this bill, thank you very much. For those of you who are involved in this important struggle, I appreciate your efforts, continue to do so. For those of you who are providing the compassionate care to those who have been affected by human trafficking, thank you for your love. And for those of you in Congress who have worked to make this reality, good work. (Applause.)

The bill is signed.) (Applause.) END 1:39 P.M. EST