

Oral Testimony by Melysa Sperber
Director of the Alliance to End Slavery & Trafficking
Humanity United Action
Before the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Global Human Rights, and International Organizations
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Of the United States House of Representatives
May 2, 2017

**Winning the Fight Against Human Trafficking: The Frederick Douglass
Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Bass, and other distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing on one of the most intractable human rights abuses of our times—the crime of human trafficking. And thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Mr. Chairman, I am the Director of the Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking. ATEST is a U.S. based coalition of 13 human rights organizations that advocates for solutions to prevent and end all forms of human trafficking and modern slavery around the world. ATEST is supported by Humanity United and Humanity United Action.

Mr. Chairman, my written statement outlines the progress we are making as well as noting important ways the U.S. government should invest in programming and implement policy solutions that will reduce vulnerability to human trafficking worldwide. I ask that my full statement be made part of the record. Additionally, I would draw the Committee's attention to ATEST's *Presidential Agenda for Abolishing Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking*. It has many important recommendations that apply to Congress as well as the new Administration, and I ask that it be made part of the record. Today, I will focus my remarks on the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act.

ATEST welcomes the introduction of the FDTPPRA, and we are particularly pleased with the bill's emphasis on prevention. Nearly two decades after the enactment of the landmark Trafficking Victims Protection Act, we have made considerable progress, particularly in mobilizing political will to prosecute traffickers and protect victims of all forms of trafficking. Progress is lagging, however, on prevention, and we commend the reauthorization's sponsors for taking up this challenge.

I first started understanding the importance of prevention when I got my first anti-trafficking job – I just did not know I was combatting human trafficking at the time. I worked for a faith-based organization serving runaway and homeless youth in New York City – children exiting the foster care system, LGBTIQ youth fleeing abusive situations, young men and women of color caught in an unforgiving criminal justice system. All of them were marginalized, all of them were desperate to survive, and all of them were at risk of human trafficking.

But I saw that if they had their basic needs covered, access to specialized services, and the promise of opportunity, the young people I met were resilient and unstoppable. And because they were receiving services they were less at risk to human trafficking and other forms of exploitation.

Later, I worked as an attorney representing immigrant women who survived being trafficked into the U.S. for labor and sexual exploitation. Each of my clients pointed to moments in their lives when – had there been services and resources available - the vulnerability they faced could have been alleviated.

The message these women conveyed was straightforward: their suffering could have been prevented. Their reason for sharing the message was just as straightforward: they wanted to prevent someone else's suffering. My clients taught me the importance of prevention, and they left me with an even more valuable lesson: survivors are the experts. They know the most about this crime – how to prevent it, how to recover from it, how to thrive as a survivor of it.

I later joined an international women's organization, where we worked with local partners to implement anti-trafficking programs supported by the U.S. State Department. I met girls whose mothers had been trafficked into local brothels. These girls knew – even at the early age of 9 or 10 – that this would have been their future if not for incredible programs that took them off the streets, provided a safe place, an education, a way out of abject poverty and vulnerability.

I also met with law enforcement, prosecutors and judges who worked to prosecute trafficking cases. They unequivocally pointed to prevention as the greatest priority. They also stressed the simultaneous challenge of finding resources and mobilizing attention on proven ways to prevent exploitation, strategies that include:

- Providing children and families with access to education, livelihood and social protection programs,
- Strengthening rule of law,
- Ensuring survivors, vulnerable youth, and workers inform the development and implementation of anti-trafficking policy.

A TEST believes the U.S. Government can and should strengthen its leadership to combat human trafficking around the world by resourcing efforts to prevent this crime and provide comprehensive services to those who are victimized. We are deeply concerned about the Trump Administration's proposed cuts to foreign assistance, which we believe could have significant impact on our anti-trafficking efforts. We commend this Committee for spurring multiple Administrations to use the full range of foreign policy tools to combat this scourge, and urge that you continue to do so as the Administration's transition continues.

[At Humanity United we focus on bringing new solutions to global problems that have long been considered intractable. For us, preventing the risk of human trafficking is a critical element of our strategy. Whether it is working alongside companies to identify and address trafficking in their supply chains, advocating for the enforcement of the Tariff Act's prohibition on the importation of slave-made goods, or learning from survivors' critical expertise, we know that solutions to trafficking begin and end with preventing this crime from occurring in the first place.]

A TEST believes the reauthorization bill would bolster our efforts to prevent human trafficking from happening in the first place. [This bill does that in ways such as:

- enhancing the integrity of the U.S. State Department's Trafficking In Persons Report,
- enabling schools to educate children about how to avoid all forms of trafficking,
- ensuring that U.S. government procurement does not fund human trafficking,
- bolstering protections for domestic workers employed by diplomats, and
- reauthorizing critical anti-trafficking programs across the U.S. Government.]

A TEST looks forward to working with the bill's sponsors and all members of the House to move it forward with strong bipartisan support. We want to continue working with the Committee to seek ways to strengthen the bill even further. A few proposed suggestions are contained in my written testimony. We also urge you to oppose deep and disproportionate cuts to the International Affairs Budget in both the FY17 and FY18 spending bills. If realized, the cuts would be devastating for anti-trafficking prevention efforts worldwide.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, for all the work you have done to ensure the U.S. Government continues to be a leader in the fight to end human trafficking worldwide.