

Opening Statement by U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel

Chairman, Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Combating Human Trafficking in China: Domestic and International Efforts March 6, 2006

"The Congressional-Executive Commission on China meets today to examine human trafficking in China. The Commission will also consider domestic and international efforts to help stop human trafficking in and through China and to help rehabilitate victims of trafficking.

Human trafficking in China is a serious problem. According to a 2002 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimate, there are approximately 250,000 victims of trafficking in China. Traffickers are increasingly linked to organized crime and specialize in abducting girls and women both for the bridal market in China's poorest areas and for sale as prostitutes in urban areas. North Korean refugees are an especially vulnerable group. Today's Administration witness, Ambassador John Miller, has estimated that 80 to 90 percent of the refugees from North Korea, particularly women and children, end up as trafficking victims.

The Chinese government has publicly acknowledged the seriousness of the problem and has taken steps to stop trafficking and aid victims. Chinese experts and officials have cooperated with international agencies including the International Labor Organization (ILO) and UNICEF to combat trafficking. China's Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women outlaws trafficking, and Article 240 of the Criminal Law outlines harsh penalties for those convicted of human trafficking related crimes.

These steps reflect a serious effort, but the Chinese government needs to do more. The Commission is concerned that China fell from "Tier 2" to "Tier 2 Watch Status" in the State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report for 2005 because of inadequate protection of trafficking victims. The Chinese government must uphold international agreements and grant the U.N. High Commission for Refugees unimpeded access to screen the refugee petitions of North Koreans in China. The Chinese government has not signed the U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

The United States can do more. In its 2005 Annual Report, the Commission recommended that the President and Congress continue to support international programs to build law enforcement capacity to prevent trafficking in and through China, and additionally should develop and fund programs led by U.S.-based Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) that focus on the protection and rehabilitation of victims, especially legal and educational assistance programs. But the Chinese government must become more open to cooperation with foreign NGOs.

To help us better understand the human trafficking problem in China, and international and domestic efforts to fight trafficking and assist victims, we turn to our witnesses.

Representative Chris Smith has been a leader in Congressional efforts to combat trafficking worldwide and assist victims of trafficking. Earlier this year, President Bush signed into law Representative Smith's

third anti-trafficking bill, the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005. This new law provides significant additional anti-trafficking and protection measures for victims and potential victims of trafficking. Representative Smith is Vice Chairman of the House International Relations Committee, and Chairman of the International Relations subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations. The Commission is very pleased that Mr. Smith will be making a statement at today's hearing.

Speaking on behalf of the Administration will be Ambassador John R. Miller, who is Director of the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons and Senior Advisor to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on human trafficking. From 1985 to 1993, Mr. Miller served in the U.S. House of Representatives from the state of Washington . While in Congress, Mr. Miller held a seat on the Committee on International Relations and was a member of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus.

After Ambassador Miller, we will hear from a distinguished panel of experts who will share their knowledge and expertise. Mr. Roger Plant will lead Panel Two. Mr. Plant is the Head of the ILO's Special Action Program to Combat Forced Labor. Mr. Plant has been a leading investigator and activist on forced labor and modern slavery for more than 30 years. Prior to joining the ILO Mr. Plant worked with the Asian Development Bank, United Kingdom Department for International Development; Inter-American Development Bank, United Nations Officer of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; Shell International, Danish International Development Agency, and several international human rights NGOs.

Ms. Wenchi Yu Perkins will provide perspectives on the problem of human trafficking to and from China . Ms. Perkins is the Director of Anti-Trafficking and Human Rights Programs at Vital Voices. Prior to joining Vital Voices, Ms. Perkins worked with victims of trafficking and conducted training for law enforcement and NGOs in the Midwest . She was also a foreign policy assistant in Taiwan 's parliament and worked in the Taiwan representative office in Chicago . She has an MA in International Relations from the University of Chicago and a BA in Political Science from National Taiwan University .

Finally, Mr. Abraham Lee will testify to the Commission on the problems faced by North Korean refugees in China. Mr. Lee is Director of Public Affairs for Crossing Borders, an NGO devoted to assisting North Korean refugees in Northeast China. Mr. Lee has been in China for the past three years working with North Korean refugees and teaching college English. He received his BA in Economics from the University of Maryland in 1999 and his JD from the University of Maryland School of Law in 2002.

We welcome all of our witnesses today and appreciate their time and presentations."