

**Remarks to Trafficking in Persons Reception
on the Occasion of a Workshop on Combating Trafficking in Persons
conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice,
Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development Assistance and Training**

by Ambassador D. Brent Hardt

Wednesday, February 15, 2012

Minister Rohee,

Minister Webster,

Minister Sukhai,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Representatives of Guyana Government and Civil Society,

Members of the Media,

Distinguished guests,

Thank you all for joining us this evening.

We are truly pleased to see such an extraordinary cross section of government officials and civil society representatives here this week to participate in this important workshop on Combating Trafficking in Persons. This engagement clearly reflects the commitment of the Government of Guyana and the people of Guyana to work in partnership to address this global threat to the dignity of children, women and men who are victims of this tragic crime. Only by working together can we hope to meet this challenge and reduce the incidence of this form of modern day slavery.

We are honored to have senior representatives of the Government of Guyana here with us this evening. I have greatly appreciated the willingness of the ministers who lead the Trafficking in Persons Task Force, including Minister Rohee, Minister Sukhai, and Minister Webster, to meet with me and members of our Embassy team to share information on the Trafficking in Persons challenges in Guyana and the efforts being made to meet them. Only last week, we were able to sit down via digital video conference with the U.S. Ambassador for Combating Trafficking in Persons, Luis Cdebaca, and hold a productive exchange that helped

align our perspectives and chart a path to closer cooperation between our countries on Trafficking in Persons.

This sharing of information and openness to working together is vital to the success of national and global efforts to combat TIP, as it is a phenomenon that respects no boundaries and requires a coordinated international response. As I prepared for my assignment as Ambassador, I learned that there have been public differences between the U.S. and Guyana over elements of our congressionally mandated Trafficking in Persons Report. And, unfortunately, such discussions tended to focus attention away from the real goal of our international engagement on the issue, which is to build the commitment, understanding, and capacity of countries around the world to combat the scourge of TIP.

The issue for all countries, including the United States, is not how many cases are occurring, but what we are doing about those that are occurring. So I am particularly pleased that we have in recent months been able to restore that vital focus and explore ways that we can work together to understand the scope of the challenge before us, protect the victims, and investigate and prosecute the perpetrators.

As a tangible manifestation of this new focus, our Embassy is very pleased to have been able to work with the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training (OPDAT) to arrange for this week's workshop on Combating Trafficking in Persons. We are fortunate to have on hand two expert trainers from the Justice Department, Brett Sagel and Xhochitl (So-chi) Arteaga, who have been able to share their extensive experience working in this area with their Guyanese colleagues. As we wrap up the second day of this four-day workshop, I wanted to spend some time with this dedicated working group and gather informally to get to know each other better in a relaxed setting and to highlight publicly our shared commitment to deepening our efforts against Trafficking in Persons.

It has been my experience from hundreds of training programs and workshops we have supported over the years that some of the most lasting benefits of these types of programs are the intangible ones – the personal connections that are forged between people working on the same issue from different perspectives and the understanding of the different institutional goals and priorities people seek in working on the same issue. So apart from the expert insights that Brett and Xochitl are imparting, which Brett has touched on and which are an essential foundation to progress, I believe there will be much lasting benefit in having this group from ministries, law enforcement, the judiciary, the DPP, diplomatic

missions, and non-governmental organizations together. For example, we have people here who can help identify victims, people who can support them, and still others who are responsible for enforcing the laws of Guyana and prosecuting traffickers. All of these gears must be turning together if we are to win the fight against trafficking in persons. Again, we are genuinely delighted with the terrific turnout this week. This group here this evening is an excellent example of the type of cooperation necessary in this fight.

This is a truly global effort. I know it is sometimes easy to look at this only from our local or national perspective, but it is important to keep in the forefront of our work the plain fact that human trafficking is not just a problem in the United States or in Guyana, but a worldwide problem. There are estimates that anywhere from 12 to 27 million people are held in conditions of servitude around the world today. Human traffickers prey on those who hope for a better life – whether it is a young girl lured away from her family only to be trapped in sexual slavery or an aspiring man who tries to make a better wage to support his family only to find himself a victim of forced labor.

President Obama outlined the dimensions of the problem when he launched our own National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month last year. He observed: “The victims of modern slavery have many faces. They are men and women, adults and children. Yet, all are denied basic human dignity and freedom. Victims can be abused in their own countries, or find themselves far from home and vulnerable. Whether they are trapped in forced sexual or labor exploitation, human trafficking victims cannot walk away, but are held in service through force, threats, and fear. All too often suffering from horrible physical and sexual abuse, it is hard for them to imagine that there might be a place of refuge.”

That is why the President called on Americans to join together as a nation and as a global community to provide that safe haven by protecting victims and prosecuting traffickers. Because it is only through improved victim identification, medical and social services, training for first responders, and increased public awareness that the men, women, and children who suffer from this scourge can receive protection and justice.

And just as President Obama urged all Americans to educate themselves about all forms of modern slavery and the signs and consequences of human trafficking, we hope that this workshop can contribute to a more frank and open national conversation in Guyana about the nature of human trafficking. For we must keep in the forefront of our work that no country is immune from modern slavery, and both the United States and Guyana are affected with victims in our own countries

and victims who are our citizens abroad. At the end of the day, this issue is not about reports and rankings, it is about people – our sisters and brothers, children and parents – who may be caught up in this web of injustice from which they cannot extricate themselves. That is why the United States has sought to bring this issue to the forefront of global attention, and why we know that the Government and people of Guyana share this commitment.

It is our hope that through this initiative and with other support from the OAS and International Organization for Migration, that key government and non-governmental personnel will be able to boost their capacity, effectiveness, and understanding of how best to meet this challenge.

Success in the fight against trafficking means preparing our institutions to be ready to assist victims whenever and where an incident should occur. And helping victims means holding offenders accountable. This week's training is a milestone in the emerging partnership between the U.S. and Guyana in the fight against trafficking. As President Obama stated recently, "We stand with those throughout the world who are working every day to end modern slavery, bring traffickers to justice, and empower survivors to reclaim their rightful freedom." I look forward to our continued partnership. Thank you all for taking time to participate this week.