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FINANCING TERROR: SELLING DRUGS, ENSLAVING WOMEN, MAKING MONEY

— Cindy Hensley McCain

Years ago, visiting Calcutta, I walked into a shop selling sari material and handicrafts. I was taken aback when through the floor-boards, I saw the eyes of children looking up at me. The shop's owner told me they were family, and they lived beneath the shop.

Only later did I realize what I had seen: these children were enslaved. They were forced to live in inhuman conditions, and to work to produce the very goods I was being offered. From that moment on, I knew that human trafficking was an abhorrent scourge on humanity, and that I must work to stop it.

Now play out that one incident across an entire globe. Millions of young girls and boys enslaved and sold for sex—their identities and their futures taken from them. Millions of women and men sold as laborers. Workers forced into labor in dangerous and low-cost factories that form part of the global supply chain for major retailers. Smugglers shipping people across borders for a fee—and largely indifferent whether their “cargo” arrives living or dead. The scale of the human trafficking industry is mind-boggling, much like the capacity of human cruelty to other humans.

Make no mistake, human trafficking is big business. In June 2015, the US Department of Homeland Security estimated that human trafficking generates \$32 billion in illegal profits per year around the globe, second only to drug trafficking. The US State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report estimates that nearly 21 million people are victims of forced labor—11.4 million women and girls and 9.5 million men and boys. They also estimate that over 2 million people are being exploited by state or rebel controlled groups and nearly 19 million by private enterprises. Of those exploited by private enterprises, the TIP report estimates that 4.5 million are victims of forced sexual

exploitation. These numbers are staggering.

The comparison to drug trafficking is relevant: drug and arms trafficking networks are often the same networks that traffic people. The difference is that while you can sell drugs or guns once or twice, you can sell a laborer, or a child for sex, over and over and over again. Children are often sold for sex 10-15 times per day.

Moreover, by providing such a vast source of revenue, trafficking networks in fact represent a major security challenge to the United States and other countries. Stronger traffickers mean stronger drug cartels, stronger arms smugglers, more crime, more pressure for corruption among government officials.

We routinely think of dictators and armies and terrorists as threats to our security. But we must recognize that human trafficking is a major security threat as well, contributing to the corrosion of developed societies in every way imaginable. And it is not some hypothetical threat off in the distance: it is happening each and every day.

I have dedicated much of the past several years fighting to end human trafficking—starting first in my home state of Arizona, and now working increasingly across the United States and internationally. We have learned a lot along the way. Following are some key thoughts on how we can all work to end human trafficking in our lifetime:

Raise awareness. The single biggest reason human trafficking persists is because people simply are not aware it is happening. We need to shine a spotlight on this issue. The more people know, the more they will fight.

Get the data. Human trafficking hard data—whether in terms of numbers of people affected or dollars involved—is notoriously absent. We need our best researchers, universities, think tanks, and governments to get research funding to establish the scale and nature of the human trafficking problem. The more we know in detail, the better we can dedicate resources and fight it.

Don't be fooled. There is no such thing as a child prostitute. Under federal law, a child sold for sex is a trafficking victim, and the adult prostituting the child is a criminal child trafficker. Let's not pretend otherwise. I am working with Human Rights for Girls Project to eradicate the use of the phrase "child prostitute" in the United States. We should do so globally.

Use technology. Traffickers need to advertise to find buyers, and they are skilled at using the internet and the "dark web" to offer services. We should be even smarter—using technology to identify and track potential cases of human trafficking. The McCain Institute for International Leadership and Thorn have worked together to produce a tool that does exactly this – and are making it available for free to law enforcement across the nation.

Treat trafficking like the security challenge it is.

Too often, combatting human trafficking is seen as a "soft" issue relegated to the "nice to do" list, or a domestic police matter unrelated to national security. Treating it in this manner reduces the attention and funding it truly deserves. We need to elevate this scourge to the level of other threats to our national security and treat it accordingly.

There is no magic bullet that will end human trafficking instantly. But equally, there can be no tolerance in our societies for trafficking of any kind—whether sexual exploitation, forced labor, or people-smuggling. It will take years of focus and hard work, but I am convinced that momentum is building, and we will end human trafficking for good.

Cindy McCain is a life-long advocate of Humanitarian Causes. She is the Co-Chair of the Arizona Governor's Task Force on Combatting Human Trafficking. She is also Chairperson of the Human Trafficking Advisory Board to the McCain Institute of International Leadership.

