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### Labor Trafficking in the U.S.

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## **Labor Trafficking in the U.S.**

### **Introduction**

The U.S. Federal Government defines human trafficking as “a crime that involves exploiting a person for labor, services or commercial sex” (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000). While there is a good amount of media coverage and growing public knowledge of human trafficking for sex, less is understood about human trafficking for labor. Human trafficking in the U.S. has increased by seventy percent from 2009-2016, yet the focus from media and the government has largely centered on the sex trafficking aspect of that increase (Miller). In fact, of the 241 federal trafficking cases, only thirteen revolved primarily around labor (Miller). The U.S. Federal Government defines labor trafficking as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery” (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000). This somewhat lengthy description of labor trafficking serves to show how detection and recognition of it is not always overt and straightforward. Trafficking victims come from all corners of the globe, in addition to U.S. citizens. Individuals can become victims of labor trafficking through three dominant tactics used by perpetrators; use of force, fraud and coercion (AWKO Justice Foundation). These tactics are used to trap individuals - often undocumented immigrants - into servitude for many different American industries. Those industries include, but are not limited to: hospitality, domestic work, restaurants and food service, construction, agriculture and animal

husbandry, clubs and bars, sales crews - industries which we interact with daily (AWKO Justice Foundation ). So, how does this trafficking process work? Well, it depends on the industry.

There are many different ways that perpetrators trap their victims into servitude - and these ways can be difficult to detect. Many involve international recruiters that promise visas and work in America to unknowing victims and their families in other countries (*Trafficked in America*). Once they arrive in America, they may be told that they need to pay off their debt for getting them into the country and are then forced to work through manipulation and abuse (*Trafficked in America*). This is often the case in agriculture and food services industries, where victims are brought here illegally and forced to work on farms across the country that serve massive food distribution chains and stores. The conditions in which these migrants live are often inhumane, as wages are scarce despite grueling work hours and conditions. As we will see through these testimonies, agriculture trafficking victims suffer immensely in unhealthy work environments and have few to no resources to escape. Immigration status is one of the biggest tools of control used by perpetrators, and Weiss points to the important difference between human smuggling and human trafficking. Individuals who opt to enter the country undocumented come to face even greater struggles in gaining freedom as the state shows less sympathy than they might with victims of human smuggling and human trafficking (Weiss 6). This is one of the many problems built into the legal system that victims face when trying to escape from their traffickers.

While many labor trafficking victims live and work in congregate settings, domestic workers often suffer from isolation. Domestic workers come to the United States to make money to support their families back at home and are guided by false promises from recruiters or families that they will be able to obtain an education (Institute for Social Policy). However, their

visas may be unknowingly fabricated or, if they are legitimate, they may be completely misleading (using student visas, marriage visas, etc.). These victims later find themselves manipulated and used as slaves - tending to all the needs of children, cooking, cleaning and everything in between with little to no pay, deplorable living conditions and restricted access to anything outside of the home (Institute for Social Policy). The Institute for Social Policy describes the common abuses as: nonpayment, monitoring or controlling movements, threats, isolation, confiscation of passports, and indebtedness. Furthermore, they use psychological threats of harming their family members or loved ones to force victims to work (Weiss). Domestic worker abuses are difficult to track and address largely due to exclusion from legal protections. For example, The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), a federal law guaranteeing rights to form unions, the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), which ensures workplace safety protections and the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which sets laws regarding minimum wage and overtime payment all initially excluded domestic workers (Institute for Social Policy). As of today, both the NLRA and OSHA continue to exclude domestic workers (the FLSA has been amended) - failing to address the growing abuses and labor trafficking of domestic workers (Institute for Social Policy). As you will read in the witness testimonies, immigrant victims of labor trafficking find themselves trapped and silenced by their employers and can often lack the English language skills to find ways to break out of the abuse (*Trafficked in America*).

Even though it is impossible to confirm the number of people trafficked in the United States, the Federal Government has estimated that about 14,500-18,000 individuals are trafficked each year (Harvard Law Review 1014). In the United States the number of arrests for labor trafficking has increased. This is not necessarily because of an increase in labor trafficking, but

rather because of more awareness in the media and more specific language being used by prosecutors that better defines this crime. Although the number of reports is increasing, the United States still struggles to detect and take action on labor trafficking cases. Only twenty of the fifty states have reported arrests for labor trafficking between 2013-2016. This could be for a number of reasons such as lack of awareness and training, or labor trafficking cases are being charged under other related criminal charges (Roe-Sepowitz ii). Many cases are not identified in the United States because of the added challenges individuals who have been trafficked may struggle with if they report a case: trauma of exploitation, fear of employer retaliation, and unfamiliarity of workplace rights (Harvard Law Review 1015). The United States makes it even more challenging for individuals to report cases because of the country's focus on anti-prostitution and border control laws. As Professor Dina Francesca Hayne explains, "the same persons charged with protecting [victims] are also charged with deporting undocumented persons, arresting prostitutes, and detaining and charging those working without authorization" (Harvard Law Review 1013).

Looking on an international level, the most prominent action that first takes place by the United Nations is the Palermo Protocol. The goal of this protocol was and is to "(1) prevent trafficking through legislation and executive and administrative action, (2) protect trafficking victims by safeguarding their identification, rescuing them from their circumstances, and assisting their recovery; and (3) punish traffickers" (Weiss 14). In terms of the United States, rather than punish traffickers as the third "P", it has been worded as prosecution. Although this protocol has positive intentions, there are still faults in it because of how ambiguous it is. Laws against human labor trafficking are defined differently between each country because of how ambiguous the United Nations' protocol is, leading to the consequence that labor trafficking

issues may not be dealt with as well in certain countries compared to others. For example, some countries only consider a case as labor trafficking if it is cross-border trafficking or if an organized criminal group is involved (Weiss 15). This isolates and undermines many individuals who are trafficked.

Specifically in the United States, it was not until the 1990s that forms of awareness about human trafficking really took place. During the same time that the Palermo Protocol was established, the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 was passed to take legal action to prevent human trafficking in the United States. This act is meant to “combat trafficking in persons, especially into the sex trade, slavery, and involuntary servitude, to reauthorize certain Federal programs to prevent violence against women, and for other purposes” (U.S. Department of State 1464). Later in 2008, the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act was passed. This act is meant to strengthen, enforce and better address the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. Although both acts were a step in the right direction, the focus centered more around sex trafficking. The Department of Labor is in a unique position though; they are capable of and should be responsible for enforcing legal action against labor trafficking. In general, the DOL is authorized to create and is responsible for employment laws. They also have a Wage and Hour Division that has investigators specifically meant to uncover cases of exploitation of workers. Although they began to take on this role during the Obama Presidency, it has been inadequate and more work needs to be done to end labor trafficking and help individuals who have been or are being trafficked.

## Witness Testimonies From the United States

***Fainess Lipenga:*** I was brought to the United States to work in the household of a diplomat from my home country, Malawi. I grew up in a poor village without electricity or running water. I suffered abuse since childhood and was in an abusive relationship as a teenager. There was little hope for a better life. So when this family promised me an opportunity in the United States, and told me I could get an education while I was there and money to help my family back home, I was so very excited. I was going to break out of poverty and help support others in my village. When we got here though, nothing was what I had been promised. My employer took away my passport, locked me in the house and disconnected the phone whenever she left home. I was made to sleep on the basement floor. I was so isolated from the outside world that I had no idea there was help available. I worked all the time – literally all the time. I cared for children and cleaned and did all manner of household chores. My employer would allow her friends and colleagues to come over and bring their children and I was to care for them as well. She yelled at me constantly and was physically abusive. On top of this, she married a man who owned a commercial cleaning business and I was put to work for him too. In the middle of the night I was taken to businesses and office buildings to clean carpets using heavy machinery. I worked all night and then was returned to my employers home to work some more. For all this, I was paid less than 40 cents an hour. I was used, like a piece of clothing you wear, like I was not a person. Everything was a nightmare, like a horror movie -except at a horror movie you can see what was happening. But for me, it was happening behind the door, so no one knew. I became physically sick. I thought I was going to die, here, all alone, and my family would never know. I thought she would just throw my body out and no one would ever find out what happened to me. Some people ask why I didn't leave. Well there were very real physical concerns. I had no money, no passport, and I didn't know anyone. I did not speak English well. But also I know now it is because of what I went through as a child. I did not really fully know that this was not normal, that a person should not be treated this way. I certainly did not know what trafficking was. Finally though, I knew I had to get out. I think the final push was when I overheard my trafficker bragging about how she had made me sign a contract, in English, which I did not know how to read at the time. She told me when I was signing that she was going to pay me \$980 a month. She was proud of this trick. I had found my passport once when I was cleaning so I knew I could get it. I slept in the basement and could hear the garage door opening and closing so I knew when I was alone and it was safe to leave. I threw a few things I had into a trash bag, grabbed my passport and left. I went to someone's home who I knew slightly who was also in the diplomatic community. She helped me to find a job with another family, which was good but I was so worn down that I got very sick. I had to be hospitalized and – I don't know how this happened – my trafficker was actually allowed to come see me in the hospital. Eventually I got well enough to leave but I still struggled emotionally, physically and financially. Physical escape was only one step on the journey to freedom. It took a lot of work and time to find a safe, supportive place to live and the help I needed. I had a lawyer and she helped very much as well. I learned English, mostly from watching cartoons and television shows! Today I am working, I am advocating for survivors of human trafficking, and I am studying to become a nurse. I am healing and I want to help others to do the same.

**Flor Molina:** “My sewing teacher was approached by a trafficker because she knew a lot of women who knew how to sew and would be desperate to come to the United States to make money. There were no opportunities in my town, so when my sewing teacher told me about the opportunity to go to the U.S., I was definitely interested. I had to leave my mom and my children behind. I was told that when I got to the U.S. I will have a job so I could send money home, food and a place to stay. When I arrived in Los Angeles, I quickly realized it had all been a lie. My trafficker told me that now I owe her almost \$3,000 for bringing me to the U.S. and that I had to work for her in order to pay her back. I was forced to work 18 hours a day making dresses that were being sold for \$200 department stores. When all the workers in the factory got to go home, I had to clean the factory. I was forced to sleep at the factory in a storage room, and I had to share a single mattress with another victim. The other workers in the factory were able to come and go at the end of their shift. I was forbidden to talk to anyone or from putting one step outside of the factory. I worked hard, and I was always hungry. I was given only one meal a day, and I had 10 minutes to eat. If I took longer, I was punished. After only a few weeks of being there, one of my co-workers started suspecting that something was not right. She had realized that I was always there in the morning when she got there and was working at night after everybody left. She gave me her phone number on a piece of paper and told me that if I needed help, I could call her. I was so afraid, I didn't really trust anybody. My trafficker told me that if I ever go to the police, they wouldn't believe me. She said that she knew where my children and my mother lived and that I wouldn't want them to pay the consequences. This went on for 40 days, but I tell you it felt like 40 years. I thought I was going to die. I thought I would never see my children again. I was sick with worry about how my children were in Mexico and how they didn't know what happened to me. After weeks of begging my trafficker to let me go to church, she finally let me go. The moment I set foot outside the factory, I decided not to go back. I went to a pay phone to call my co-worker, but I didn't know how the pay phone worked. After a while, someone walked by, and I asked him if he spoke Spanish, and he did. He helped me dial the phone number, and my co-worker came and picked me up and took me to a restaurant. I was found by FBI agents who were already investigating my trafficker. They connect[ed] me with CAST (Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking), a non-profit group. CAST found me shelter and helped me with all my basic necessities because I had nothing when I escaped. Ultimately, my trafficker was charged with labor abuse and got a light sentence - only six months of house arrest. Even though my enslavement doesn't define me as a person, it makes me who I am today. I am an advocate against slavery. I am a survivor of a crime so monstrous that the only way to move forward is by fighting back. I am not the only one. There are other survivors that are fighting back with me. We are part of a group called the survivors caucus at CAST, and we are working to educate people, law enforcement and communities using our stories. The caucus is a network of survivors where we feel safe and supported, and we have advocacy to end slavery for good. Even though we were once victims, we are now able to impact social change.”

**Yuri Guerrero:** Hi my Name is Yuri Guerrero, and I am a survivor of severe form of labor human trafficking. My sisters and I survived decades of labor trafficking by a US citizen. We were slaves, exploited for the majority of our childhood, all my youth and some of my adult life. We were coerced physically and psychologically to performed labor services. We worked for nearly 20 years without any compensation. We were treated worse than animals, and we were ripped apart from our family, and suffered a horrible ordeal.

*How did you meet your trafficker?*



Everything started in Mexico when we were children. Our mother and father were unable to care for us. My mom's friend, who had the appearance of an angel, came to our house one day offering love, hope and support. She was mother figure to us. However little by little she was gaining control over our lives to the point where she controlled everything. She controlled the way we talked, felt, thought, dressed, what we ate, and believed. We were children so we did what we were told. When I was 15 years old she asked us to move with her to the US, so we left our family. She immediately stopped us from having any contact with them because according to her they were "despicable". She made us feel ashamed because our mother was mentally ill. We were children looking for a mother figure to love us and protect us, because our beautiful, talented and sweet mother was unable to do so due her illness.

*What happened after you began relying on your trafficker?*

Eventually she decided to move to USA, because she is a citizen of this country. She brought us here illegally to work for her and her family. Here in the US it was worse because she kept our documents and constantly repeated to us that no one in this world will care about us. She claimed she loved us like a mom, and everything she did was for our good because she did not want us to become like our ill mother. We worked so hard without any compensation. I used to have 3 jobs and she kept all the money that I earned. We received no medical care, little food, and almost no rest. We did not have days off, no vacations, no social life, no education, no dreams... we lived in a state of survival. We were on the edge of losing ourselves due to the extreme stress and abuse that we were subjected to on a daily basis.

*Did you try to leave?*

I tried to escape several times but when night fall came and I realized I did not have any documentation and nowhere to go. My life story sounded so unreal even to me. Her words would echo in my mind that no one would believe me. There was no other option but to call her to come and pick me up to take me back to my life of sorrow. I had to accept that this was my life now.

*How did you gain the courage to finally escape?*

It was hard. One day, after 19 years of abuse, I was not able to take it anymore. Actually, every day was unbearable but I resisted because my sisters were there and I did not want to lose them. On that particular day, when I decided to leave without returning back, I felt that I was drowning and I needed air. I was not able to care for anything else. I just needed air to breath, air to live. I remember very clearly how I felt that day and everything that happened after that. I would do it again in a heartbeat because that was the first step of my real freedom and my first step of healing and loving me. Eventually all my sisters escaped too! Now we are all working on building up our relationship in love, forgiveness and peace.

*What happened after your escape?*

The second step to healing was reporting our case to Mosaic Family Services. It took me 11 years to finally gain the strength to fight. When my sister and I reunited we did not want to talk about our story because we were very afraid people would reject and not believe us. A few people knew. At the time we did not know that all that we went through was a criminal act under the laws in the USA. However one day, in 2015, I woke up with the firm decision to report it! It was the only way I could move forward with my life.

*How did you find out about Mosaic Family Services?*

I knew about Mosaic Family Services through another agency. They gave me Mosaic's information and I emailed them. Mosaic responded to my email and called me on the telephone. We had our first appointment with our caseworker Jerusalem. We were shaking and very

skeptical if she would even help us. It was so hard to step in a room with a total stranger and tell her our story. We felt totally naked and vulnerable! But Jerusalem was so patient and kind. She showed sincere concern when we were talking and all her expressions and words were telling us, I believe you! I believe your story! That was huge to us!

*How did Mosaic Family Services help you?*

We asked for counseling and legal advice. She explained the process and set up an appointment with our counselor and lawyer. Mosaic helped us report the crimes to a special police unit that handles human trafficking cases. It was a painful process, remembering all the awful things that happened to us. Our case, like every case, is complicated and unique. All that we lived through, the process of the investigation and the court process was very difficult. Every time things became difficult, and the shadows wanted to suffocate me, I remind myself that now I'm free. Eventually, we went to court and in January 2017 the woman that hurt us was finally jailed!

*What do you want someone who's reading your story to know?*

As a survivor, I'm learning to live with my scars and missing pieces. I used to feel broken, irreparable... But now I'm learning to squeeze from my life every single drop of joy and opportunity to live life to the fullest and enjoy my freedom. I share my story because I believe every human being should have the right of freedom and dignity. Sadly, it is not that way. I want to empower survivors to keep healing and to regain their voices, their dreams, their freedom, their lives. I want to empower all the people that fight against the horrible crime of human trafficking, modern day slavery, and exploitation to keep working to help free people. You may be regarded greatly in this life and eternity. I want to raise awareness, educate communities, to the point that it becomes contagious to take action against Human Trafficking. We can all do our part to overcome evil with good. There are many millions of people still being held captive, help them. Free them.

*How can someone help?*

I will keep healing for a lifetime, one day at a time, thanks to Mosaic Family Services. They are the light and bridge for restoration for survivors. You can help by making a donation to them right now.

*How does life look like for you now that you are free?*

I'm a lifelong learner and dreamer. I enjoy singing, art, cooking healthy meals, making jewelry, spending time with my family and empowering people. At the present moment, I'm a Community Health Worker, Advocate & Mentor of children & Youth, as well as a Survivor Advocate Speaker. In the near future I plan to get my Real Estate License, to keep using my voice singing, advocating, mentoring and empowering survivors and the community against Human Trafficking. For a life of freedom, love, dignity and health!

***Natalicia Tracy:*** My mother used to tell me, "I want you to go to school for me." She herself had never had the chance. She came from a family of 10 children, and became a domestic worker, caring for another family's children, by age 8. She stayed with them for eight more years, until she met and married my father. I grew up in a small town in southeastern Brazil. My goal was always to finish high school, then go onto some kind of professional training. But it was difficult. In my district there were not enough schools for the number of children, so the school day was divided into three sessions. I went to the early session, from 7 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Then from noon until bedtime, plus weekends, I worked for a neighbor who had asked me at age 8 to care for her 2-year-old daughter, and later, her second daughter. When I was 14, I moved in

with my older sister across the country to help take care of her newborn and pursue my dream of getting an education. To support myself, I began to work nearby as a nanny for a family of two doctors who had recently had a baby. About two years later they invited me to travel with them to Boston to care for their toddler. Being a frustrated teenager in Brazil, I saw it as an opportunity for myself. Everyone around me encouraged me to go. I didn't know it then, but I would become a survivor of labor trafficking, as I later testified to the Connecticut state senate. We agreed verbally that I would work for the family for two years. I would be part of the family, they said. They planned on doing a lot of traveling, visiting museums, and so on. They only had one child, and my job was to take care of him. I got a domestic-worker visa, and I didn't even have to go to the U.S. embassy to pick it up. I never had to do an interview. I was never asked any questions. Only later I found out that I would get paid \$100 per month, or \$25 per week, with room and board included. Because I was underage, I needed my parents' permission to travel abroad. I traveled home from my sister's house and read them a letter from the family that would employ me. They were happy for me and signed the forms. I was granted a two-year domestic-worker visa. A few weeks later, in 1990, I boarded a plane to Boston carrying a Portuguese-English dictionary, some (warm-weather) clothes, and some cassette tapes of Caetano Veloso, Tina Turner, and New Kids on the Block. I remember feeling nervous on the plane. I'd be in a new country, learning a new language. But the family told me I had nothing to worry about. They said this would be new for them too, and we would all learn together. Those conversations made me feel safe. But things started going wrong from the beginning. For example, the family was told by the building management that to receive mail, their names had to be on the mailbox. So they put their names on, but not mine. I couldn't receive mail. I tried to put it on there several times, but every time, they took it off. There were more, little things. They asked me to do more than just childcare. They asked me to do the dishes, because running the dishwasher was too expensive. They said I couldn't use the phone to call home, because it was also too expensive. One day, they said they wanted to turn my bedroom into a guest room, and told me to stay on the porch. It was a "three-season porch," one that had storm windows, a concrete floor, and a big red door with thick rubber around it to keep the cold—the cold of my new room—from coming into the rest of the house. I had to sleep on a futon on the floor. Beneath that, I put cardboard boxes, to insulate me from the concrete. Remember, this is Boston. I did have a space heater, but for many months each year, the floor was frigid. Every day, I woke up at 6 a.m., dressed, and worked nonstop, from morning until night. I made breakfast and served the family. I cleaned the house until it was spotless. I took care of their child. I did all the laundry. One thing I never understood was that they wanted everything ironed: bathroom towels, sheets, even underwear. At 11 p.m. at night, after I'd made dinner, tidied up, washed the dishes, and the children were sleeping, I would have to do the ironing. Sometimes they had family visit from Brazil, or people over for dinner, and I had to cook and clean for them too. None of the guests ever said a word to me. Neither, mostly, did the parents themselves. There was very little conversation between us. I was a fixture in the house; a robot there to do things for them. I felt invisible, dispensable, and alone. Many days I worked 15 hours straight. At some point, they began to ration how much food I should prepare. Often, they would eat everything I cooked and leave nothing for me. On those nights, I would go out late at night and get something from a nearby store. That money came out of my already small earnings. After a while, they had a second baby, which I was expected to care for as well, and my pay was increased to \$150 per month. For three months, I got asthma from inhaling ammonia and Clorox, and couldn't sleep at night. Even though they were medical doctors, they never took me to the doctor or checked me

out themselves. The wife told me to take some of the kids' medicine before going to bed. I felt I was not treated as a person. Life went on like this for two years. One thing I know is hard to understand for people who grew up with a lot of autonomy is why I didn't speak up or walk out. Often, for those of us who grow up poor, we don't have the tools to challenge the people who hold power over us. In situations like these, there are all sorts of power dynamics at play. For one thing, my visa was tied to my work with the family. Where would I go if I walked out? I didn't speak English and had no one. I was not getting the education I was promised. Who could I turn to? Many people in these situations are afraid to trust government agencies or the police. I did question things from time to time. But I would get yelled at quickly. Once, the wife told me I shouldn't disrespect her, and that I should kiss the ground she walked on. It was hard emotionally—and confusing. I had worked for the family in Brazil, and there, I never felt mistreated. I would go with them to their vacation homes in Brazil. But something changed in the U.S. And I did feel a very real connection with the children. The oldest boy would make drawings for me and comfort me when I cried. People don't understand that you can't just walk out. Even if you are not in physical chains, there are constraints—economic, emotional, social—that keep women like me in place. There's a lot of coercion—and denial. We think, "Oh, my boss is just having a bad day, I need to be understanding." They told me up-front that if I didn't like it, they could get me a ticket to go home. But for me that wasn't so easy: Coming from a simple family, it was instilled in me that all I have is my values, my word, and my commitment. I wasn't supposed to ever break it. And I worried that if I spoke up, I would get thrown out. The porch was bad, but being out on the street with no English would have been much worse. I blamed myself for what was happening. I would write to my family and say that everything was fine, that the city was beautiful. I never told my family about the situation, because I felt it was my fault. I thought if I went back to Brazil, I would be blamed for not being tough enough. Toward the end, I was able to bargain in exchange for time to go to English classes. I said that if they helped me go to school, I would leave dinner in the oven and clean everything afterward and finish things up in the middle of the night. In addition, every other weekend, they would go out, and I would care for the children from dinnertime until 2 a.m. At first, my English classes cost \$30 a month, which I paid. Later I was able to find a free class. The family returned to Brazil. But I had nothing to show for my time in the U.S. I decided not to go home. I found work with another couple who bought me my first winter jacket, asked what I wanted when they went to the grocery store, and encouraged my studies. I stayed with them for 14 years. Since then, I've built a life and career. I cleaned homes, and did eldercare for 15 years. By working two to three jobs at a time, I was able to finish school. Eventually, I got a Ph.D. in sociology from Boston University. I volunteered at the Brazilian Worker Center, a community-based organization in Boston that works for the empowerment of Brazilian immigrants. In 2010, I became its executive director, and helped shepherd, in coalition with other groups, the first law to protect the rights of domestic workers across Massachusetts. And now, every day, I work so that women who are in situations like the one I was in can get out and build lives of their own.

***Evelyn Chumbow:*** "I never knew that I would come and become a slave in the United States and especially at age 9. The image of what I had of the U.S. is completely from what I saw on television. You know, the Cosby Show and Fresh Prince of Bel Air, 90210. And so when I was told that I was going to come to the U.S. and be adopted and get a better education, I was excited. But I came and I became a slave right here in Maryland, not that far from the capitol. If you see something, say something because a lot of neighbors saw me. I probably could have

been rescued when I was like, 13 or 14. If you see a little girl taking another kid to school, something is wrong, you know? But nobody said anything. I was working, cooking and cleaning. I did not go to school from age 9. It's like I'm older now so I usually say 17, but I kinda say 21 now because I really got my education after I got out of foster care. I always call ourselves the freedom fighters because we are the next generation. You know like Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Tubman because we want to make sure that nobody is in this type of situation because it's hard.

**Mary:** So as a junior in my undergrad degree of social work I had some electives I needed to fill. There was a class opening called Human Trafficking. I knew a little bit about trafficking, it is something that happens to foreign nationals, but it's not. A few weeks into the semester were starting to kind of lay down the foundations of what exploitation looks like. The small of it is that its the exploitation of another human being for labor, which includes sex, using these three key words: force, fraud and coercion. There was something particular about the way that the profesor talked about the ways that trafficekrs used these types of techniques or mechanisms to get someone to comply and many of those that were talked about were actual experiences of mine and that i had experienced exploitation and what people commonly refer to know as human trafficking. When you're in that relationship, when you're in that space, it's often really difficult to see what's happening. And when this professor in particular started to lay out this language around forced, no food, lack of sleep, forced to move consistently, the light bulb started to come on. Because I could literally start to recall those things as that professor was laying those things out. I remember when I was kept up for days, 3 or 4 days at a time. I remember what it was like to not have food or to be cut off from basic needs that would debilitate me from leaving or running or fleeing or calling law enforcement. Life was a little rough as a young person. I came from a divorced family, I had alcoholism pretty rampant in my family, some physical abuse that was going on in the household and I found substances to ease that pain. Well there came a day when those substances no longer worked and when that started to happen I couldn't stop. I was showing up at drug houses, I was showing up at places I had no business being as a young individual and I was starting to date or be in intimate relationships with people who were either selling or using and that's when things started to shift. I was told that I was going to need to do some things in order to pay off a drug debt. Once that drug debt was paid off then it was 'you need to continue to do this just to stay alive'. Life got really shitty really quick. So I end up in this house in the South Side of Chicago with about 13 other girls, working 15-16 hours a day in the middle of Chicago snow storms putting restaurant flyers on people's doors. In one of the days where we were putting flyers on doors, I stole someone's mail out of their mailbox to steal a stamp to try to get a letter to my parents to let them know where I was. I don't know how many days it was from when I put that letter in the mail until the time I was able to leave. Um, but there, there came this moment where I was coming down the stairs in this house and the phone rings and the gentlemen who was keeping us answers and it's my mom on the phone. He hands the phone to me and she tells me to walk out the front door and don't look back, just walk. And I never looked back. Um, \*starts to cry\*, I absolutely never looked back. And I knew that I had a long road ahead of me but anything was better than what I had just been through and um, I knew that I needed to sit out and heal for a bit. So that following year, in 2006, I got this great idea that I needed to go to college. And, um, I do, I sign up for college and I come home, tell my mom and it's this most amazing moment in my life. I'm gonna go and I start my journey in academics. It's funny to think about how language changes your view of yourself and how language can set you free in a lot of ways. Not knowing or having the concept or analysis to understand what you've

experienced and to be given that was its own set of freedom outside of fleeing from my exploitation in 2005. So it was a big gift and a big shift and I did not want another young girl to think that she was bad, she was deviant, that she just makes bad decisions, that she just got into a bad relationship. I wanted young women, and people in general to know that it's not okay, it's not okay for people to exploit you. So I've used that as my platform. Here I am, seven years later, working in this anti-trafficking movement. I teach now the same human trafficking class that I sat in, which is super crazy. And being able to give that knowledge back to students but also there's this weird space where I wonder if someone else is in this room who may have experienced exploitation and will come to that realization in the framework that I may have, or that I did. Trafficking looks different for everyone. And it's easily misidentified and it's easily skewed. So, I feel like my journey has led me here to be the voice and to be able to share that again in a light that's authentic.

***Anonymous 1:*** Usually we show up to a site about six o'clock and we wouldn't get done until five. And we didn't get breaks. We could never sit down and have like half an hour break, it was like five minutes tops. And they go and drink some water and their energy drinks and then go back to work.

***Anonymous 2:*** When you're working it gets to be over 90 degrees. A lot of people almost fainted, going to the door gasping for air. There were a lot of people living there, up to seven, eight people. Living in one house with two rooms, three rooms. They were basically living on top of each other. The house was in complete disrepair. The air conditioners didn't work. The heaters didn't work either. To bathe or wash our clothes we had to use water in buckets. There were cockroaches. It was total neglect.

***Anonymous 3:*** Aroldo arranged the trip for me. My journey to the U.S. was much longer and more terrible than I could have imagined. We only ate one time a day. I felt totally hopeless, like I wanted to die. I eventually was taken across the U.S. border. When I arrived in Ohio, a woman and a man picked me up at the airport. Then they brought me to some trailers that were cold. Eight people were already living in that trailer. I didn't want to stay in the tiny, overcrowded trailer. She told me I had to work tomorrow at this company called Trillium Farms. There were a lot of chickens there. All the minors were working at this farm.

***Anonymous 4:*** It's not easy working off \$600 a week and out of that they take away \$550. That's not easy. When someone didn't want to give up their money, or they didn't want to pay, or complain, they would call their family 'we're going to take away your land' and 'you're going to lose all your money' or they would issue death threats. Many of my friends told me that they received death threats they would kill their father or mother if they didn't want to pay or work.

***Anonymous 5:*** The first day I arrived, I didn't want to return because it was so horrible. It was very cold and the carts that we would take out of the cooler were heavy. The machines are very sharp and if you're not paying attention, you put your hand in and it will cut everything. We were working and working. We thought we were going to leave at 10 pm. That's the time we leave, but the supervisors arrived and said 'no you can't leave at 10 because we have a lot of

work and we have to get the order out'. They told me I couldn't leave until midnight. Because the contractors can make you do whatever they want.

And the contractors knew that you were all minors?

Yes

So when you would see other kids, would you talk to them? Did you know how they felt? Yes, but since they have debt like I did, they can't quit, because they have to pay that debt. That's why they continue to work there. Even though they want to quit, the debt pushes them to work.

***Harold D'Souza:*** In India many people dream of coming to the United States. People believe America is paradise and that only the truly blessed get to go to America. America was and still is considered one of the most powerful countries in the world. We never had running water and electricity growing up in India. The concept of restroom and bathroom never prevailed in those days. Every family will draw water from the 'WELL'. In every 'WELL', there is a frog. The frog believes, this is his world, not knowing there is a better world outside of the 'WELL'. Similarly, a victim in human labor trafficking believes that living under the control of the "Perpetrator" is the only "World". The victim is manipulated, tricked and trapped by the "Perpetrator". The victim is mesmerized by the trafficker, unable to understand that there is a better world with happiness, respect, choice, care and freedom. On May 29, 1994 my wife Dancy and I married in India. Ours was an arranged marriage and we have been happily married for over 25 years. This itself speaks volumes of our culture, values, character, moral and education system. Every adult in the community, we respect them as 'Uncle' or 'Auntie', be it a man or women walking on the streets. Dream come true, I was invited to the United States of America on a H1B Visa as a 'Business Development Manager' on \$75,000 salary plus benefits in the year 2003. Dancy my wife, sons, Bradly then 7 years and Rohan then 4 years old were on an H4 Dependent Visa. I came to America on four things. I came on trust, I came on faith, I thought I came on a promise and most importantly I came to live my American dream. Dancy and I were to work in a restaurant. The perpetrator made Dancy work for 18 months on a \$200 salary per month, and never paid her a penny.

Every country has its SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats). People around the globe are mesmerized by America's Strengths and Opportunities only, not knowing, that no one, at first glance, even thinks about the weakness of victims and threats from perpetrators in America. Imagine that you wake up in a place where you don't know the culture, you don't know the laws, you don't know the people and you don't know the resources. Imagine that you thought you were going for a better life for yourself and your family but find yourself on the floor with no bed. You're working 16 hours a day, 365 days with no weekly off days. Imagine you have no food and no money because someone you trusted took the \$1000/- in cash, and documents you had "to keep it safe" and provided with a one-bedroom apartment with no furniture, no microwave and not knowing how to operate the thermostat in freezing winter. The perpetrator then threatens with getting you arrested, handcuffed, jailed and deported if you didn't continue working without pay. You're working so many hours that you can't get home to care for your two small children. The perpetrator manipulated by promising to buy a house for my family, I never wanted a Bank loan but was forced into it against my wish. The perpetrator took a huge Bank loan to create a debt bondage. I never applied for a Bank loan and was granted over five figures in a bank check in my name. The perpetrator then takes me to his million-dollar

house to celebrate the loan, by pouring scotch in a shot glass, late afternoon. The perpetrator said joyfully, “cheers you are a rich man”, we clink our glasses and before the alcohol could reach my belly, the perpetrator hands over a hand-written note stating, I owe him this much money in \$\$\$\$\$\$? Which was not \$10,000 or \$20,000 or \$40,000 but much more. I lost four things in one second; I lost my voice, courage, hope and freedom. Before I could understand what hit me, the perpetrator pats me on my back, and tells; ‘do not worry, you still owe me much more’. I was devastated. Where in the world and how am I going to pay him back this money. Friends this is a red flag “Debt Bondage”. Our situation went from bad to worse, right from life threats, hiring a guy to shoot, child abuse, kidnapping of my kids, mailing fraudulent law enforcement agencies letters, discrimination as illegal and treating us as criminals. Labor trafficking victims especially foreign nationals are nick named as “Illegal”. Every perpetrator in the United States of America address their slave as illegal, never by their names. Perpetrators are psychopaths. I failed on 3P’s. I failed as a parent, I failed as a provider and I failed as a protector to my family. I confess, I was a sinner, I was a failure and I was a defeated, depressed man. I was dying, starving and distressed; and my instability greatly affected my family.

For any common man to survive in the United States of America you need four things; (1) State ID. (2) Work Permit. (3) Social Security Card (SSN). (4) Freedom. All victims are human beings, but perpetrators treat victims as commodities. Then, Dancy my wife was my voice. I had surrendered, lost my self-esteem, dignity and hope. Dancy confronted the perpetrator for her back wages; the perpetrator with a cold look told Dancy; “I will right now call the immigration officials get you arrested, handcuffed, jailed and deported. What salary? You are illegal, you are not supposed to work. Who told you to work?” Dancy told the perpetrator “Just pay the \$1000 cash which Harold gave you”. The perpetrator calls me; looks into my eyes and with cold blood tells me; “What cash? What money? You never gave me any cash”. I was aghast, traumatized and speechless. Fortunately, the chef in the restaurant I was working in overheard the conversation. It truly seemed to be the case that; “In God's home there is delay no denial”. The chef was in a similar situation before and took us to the U. S. Department of Labor. Every survivor has a painful story, but every painful story has a happy ending. Accept the pain and get ready for happiness.

## **International Witness Testimonies**

\*We added a number of witness testimonies from victims of labor trafficking in other countries to provide further insight into victims’ experiences. Many of these testimonies share similar sentiments and/or conditions we see in the testimonies of those in the United States.\*

***Tikrit:*** I do not know how I got to be a wahaya (slave) in Niger. I know I became one when I was only 10 years old and lived as one for 15 years. A man called Amola owned me and we lived in his family village. I was his only slave and my clothes set me apart from his four legal wives. They dressed decently, while my clothes barely covered me. He used to come to me at night in secret for sex. My workload was heavy. I had to fetch water for all the family. I had to fetch water for over 100 cattle. I had to hull and pound millet and sorghum for food. I had to provide firewood for the family. I often had to prepare everything for and during large community gatherings for up to 40 people that took place in the fields during the rainy season. I had to wash up, keep the courtyard clean, prepare all the beds and look after the children. These were my tasks until Amola died.



**Phengma:** I come from a village in Savannakhet province. My family was poor so I had to leave school at grade 5 to help on the rice fields. I heard about a good job in Thailand, which would pay around 75 Euros a month plus food and accommodation. I was desperate to help my family so I took up the offer. Together with another girl I travelled to Thailand in a service truck. I worked at Mr. P's food shop but I was too slow so had to do housework for him instead. For seven days I laboured at his house. He beat me on the head and torso with a metal ice shovel every day. Or he would use a paddle. His wife would throw chilli in my face, pour cleaning liquid on me or repeatedly immerse my head in hot water. With raw bruises I was forced to work. I had to sleep outdoors on the floor. I was never paid. Eventually, some neighbours took pity on me and helped me to escape. Monks from a temple brought me to a hospital. I then spent almost two years in a shelter in Thailand before I was repatriated to Laos in 2014. I was successful in taking legal action against Mrs. P and received 500 Euros in compensation.

**Anonymous:** I had no job for so long and during one of my attempts to find work on the Internet I got a message from a man named Fedor. He invited me to Kiev. During our meeting I was offered to sell my kidney and travel to Costa Rica. I wasn't told that such an intervention could cause severe health problems. But I felt I had no choice. Fedor got me to the United Arab Emirates first, where we went to the clinic to see if my kidneys were healthy enough and suitable for transplantation. After that I was taken to Costa Rica where I was immediately put in a medical facility. I was always under the close watch of Fedor and his guards. I did think about changing my mind but all along I felt that I couldn't really refuse to do it anymore. They were constantly reminding me that refusing such an "arrangement" could be deadly. After the operation I did receive some money. I was taken back to Ukraine by the guards and only after that did I fully realize what had actually happened. I went to the police because I don't want this to happen to other people.

**Urmat:** My sister and I lived with our aunt in a village in the region of Osh. Our family struggled to make ends meet and did not have a stable income. One day, I met a man who promised to help me. At night I left the house without saying anything to my aunt and went with the man to Bishkek. At Bishkek's Osh Bazaar, I started begging for money. The man would take my money away. I started living with other children in a shack near the Osh Bazaar. The man would beat us if we disobeyed him. Eventually, I was detained by police. A doctor inspected me and I was diagnosed with tuberculosis. I was provided with medical and psychological care in the Rehabilitation Centre for Minors. I was given new clothes and shoes, and provided with other relevant reintegration assistance.

**Mark:** I was unemployed. I had no income whatsoever and a guy pulled up next to me in a quite expensive car. He said as well as work he'd give me somewhere to stay, provide food for me and he'd pay me £50 a day. I jumped at the chance but soon he stopped paying me anything at all. Everyone at the site was working up to 15 hours a day, and it was very heavy physical work. There were a lot of broken looking people. There was no rest; every waking minute of each day was working somehow. There were, I'd say around 20 other workers on the site who were working for other members of my boss's family. They were beaten for the slightest thing or for not working fast enough. I've seen people attacked with work tools, with spades, with pick

axes. They had their heads shaved and they made 15 men live in a horsebox. It was very much like a concentration camp. A lot of them were extremely hopeless; there were guys that had been there for five years or more. They'd given up all hope. They couldn't see any way to leave, they'd seen people try to leave in the past and every single time a day or two later, they'd be dragged back. At the time I was 24 years old, I have a decent education, I'm physically fit. It's a 'How could this happen to me?' sort of thing. It's really, really difficult for people to understand that it could happen to anybody. It just requires that somebodies' circumstances change, that things get worse for them. It could happen to absolutely anybody.

***Cristina:*** My name is Cristina. I am 15 and I come from Romania. I lived there, and then went to England. I stayed with my little sisters and brother. I minded them; I was always at home with them. And then... one day, my mother married me off. A friend of hers came to our house and said he wanted to marry me. I heard this, and cried, and did all kinds of things not to marry him. She said: "it's my decision, you just live by it." My husband was 18. I was only 13 and couldn't do anything. He was mean. He didn't know how to act with a girl of 13 or 14. He acted as if I were a woman of 20 or 30. Then I went to Romania where they made my passport and stuff. After that I went to Spain. I stole and he stayed home. I never wanted to steal but I had to or he would hit me. He saw that stealing wasn't working in Spain, so we came to Belgium. I thought what I was doing was wrong and I wanted to stop. I got myself arrested voluntarily. If I hadn't done that, I wouldn't be here. They put me in a centre and I started to live a normal life. When I think about it all my heart breaks.

***Ilyas:*** "I met a man at the unemployment exchange who offered me a job in construction in neighbouring Kazakhstan. The man took me and two others to a farm in Kazakhstan. When we arrived, we saw 20 other men and women from the Kyrgyz Republic working on the farm. Soon after arriving we were beaten up, threatened and forced to do hard labour for a month. We were given food and tobacco in limited quantities. After a month I was able to run away and get to the border. Two months later I went to the authorities. They opened a criminal case and sent an investigation request to their Kazakhstani counterparts. Kazakhstani authorities looked into the matter and concluded that there was no evidence to support the claim of human trafficking for forced labour.

***Affoué:*** I had a good childhood but when I was 15 my father said it was time to go to Europe to study. The papers were taken care of, we got the tickets and they took me to Abidjan airport. A lady and a gentleman were waiting for me. All these years that I stayed with them I did everything. I had to serve breakfast at 5am and prepare snacks for the parents. Then I took care of the children: wake them, feed them, take them to school, do the shopping clean the house and make lunch. After lunch I had to take the children back to school and do any other chores and cook dinner. Sometimes they even woke me to wash the gentleman's car. They used to say 'if you go out don't tell anyone you have no papers'. I lived in constant fear. Whenever they said to do something, I did it. And if I didn't, I was told off. I slept in a cubbyhole. When I lay down my feet were going up. I wasn't getting paid. She said they were keeping the money in the bank for me. Then one day they said: "Affoué, we need your travel authorisation". I didn't know what this was but it meant I could never return because they had bought my tickets. That's when they said no, we never said anything about money in the bank for you. I started to rebel. Little by little, I understood with the help of friends and neighbours that I had to take things in my own hands, I

stayed for 12 years, until I was 27. I felt so very hurt and betrayed. Every time I think about the wrong they've done me I feel angry, but then I think anger doesn't help. You have to move forward. Today I have a beautiful baby boy who makes me happy. My advice would be that human beings have to stop harming their fellow humans that slavery has to end. We are all human beings. We are all equal.

**Sang:** I am the youngest of six children from a village in Laongam district. In 2009, when I was 15, my mother passed away and my father remarried. I left school and, together with a friend, crossed over to Thailand to seek employment. After nine months of badly paid work on a farm and as a housekeeper, I was arrested and repatriated to my family. After two weeks I agreed to an offer of great work and was smuggled overland to Thailand. However, this was not the employment I was promised. I had to work for a person in Bangkok where I had to clean houses, work at wholesale stores and in construction. I was forced to work long hours with no days off; I was beaten and tortured; denied access to a phone and forbidden from contacting anyone. I didn't get paid. After six years, I managed to escape and found work but was always scared of the authorities. All employers took advantage of my situation and never paid me fully. Finally, with some assistance, I managed to go to the Embassy of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in Bangkok and was repatriated in 2016 but without any money. With the help of a charity, I found shelter in Pakse and was offered a family and community assessment as well as a health check-up and counselling. I am now working to become a hairdresser and hope to open my own beauty salon in the near future.

## **Conclusion**

In the United States, labor trafficking disproportionately affects immigrants, who make up 76% of these victims (Roe-Sepowitz et al. iii). Immigrants are significantly more vulnerable to human trafficking than non-minority groups for a number of reasons: the necessity of their immigration papers, their unfamiliarity with the United States as well as the English language, and their isolation from family and friends, who are often left behind in their home countries. Another population that is disproportionately vulnerable is those who have already suffered emotional or physical abuse before their trafficking. Labor traffickers use tactics that mirror those of abusive personal relationships in order to prevent victims from escaping. As a result, many of these victims have difficulty recognizing their conditions as exploitative because they were not unlike relationships that they have previously experienced. Traffickers are aware of the inherent vulnerabilities pertaining to each of these communities, and deliberately exploit them in order to trap victims under their employment.

It is not unusual for an individual's descent into labor trafficking to be a gradual process. In fact, 62.5% of victims were trapped in labor trafficking by people they already knew (Roe-Sepowitz et al. iii). Many immigrants in the United States have been forced into labor trafficking by people who they originally trusted to bring them across the border, both through legal immigration and human smuggling alike (Weiss 6). Traffickers convince victims of their kindness and generosity, promising things like education and employment once they reach the United States. When they feel as if their victims trust and depend on them, traffickers gradually seize more control over them until they are isolated from the outside world. In addition to this, traffickers try to prevent their escape by being physically and emotionally abusive towards

victims. The combination of these two dynamics causes individuals who have already experienced abuse to be less likely to recognize their treatment as irregular.

Yuri Guerrero was trapped in labor trafficking by a friend of her mother's. Her trafficker was aware of her mother's mental illness, and she understood how this played a role in the relationship between Yuri and her mother. Because Yuri and her sisters were so young, their trafficker was able to convince them that they needed to rely on her because their mother was unfit to raise them. In the following passage, Yuri Guerrero describes how her trafficker convinced her and her sisters to be ashamed of their mother's mental illness, with the intention of stepping into a maternal role in order to seize more control over them:

[My trafficker] made us feel ashamed because our mother was mentally ill. We were children looking for a mother figure to love us and protect us, because our beautiful, talented and sweet mother was unable to do so due her illness... Here in the US it was worse because she kept our documents and constantly repeated to us that no one in this world will care about us. She claimed she loved us like a mom, and everything she did was for our good because she did not want us to become like our ill mother. (Guerrero)

Yuri's trafficker used psychological abuse to convince her and her sisters that she was the only person in the country who would care for them, and that they were therefore incapable of finding a healthier work environment. She knew Yuri and her sisters experienced a strained relationship with their mother and exploited this insecurity in order to make them feel reliant on her. Their trafficker deliberately took advantage of their emotional vulnerability.

Fainess Lipenga experienced an abusive childhood, as well as an abusive relationship when she was a teenager. Her testimony explains how she is no stranger to physical nor

emotional abuse, so it was difficult for her to realize the extremity of her working conditions while she was trapped in labor trafficking. Relative to previous experiences, her treatment did not strike her to be unusually abusive or cruel. She was unaware that it was not normal for employees to be treated that way, nor did she feel confident in her ability to find a better source of income. In the following passage, she describes this experience:

I suffered abuse since childhood and was in an abusive relationship as a teenager. There was little hope for a better life... But also I know now it is because of what I went through as a child. I did not really fully know that this was not normal, that a person should not be treated this way. I certainly did not know what trafficking was. (Lipenga)

The family who trafficked her was aware of the hopelessness she felt about life in Malawi. They convinced her that she would receive a stable income and an education if she followed them to the United States, only to exploit her for domestic work. Lipenga's traffickers frequently yelled at her and physically abused her, even though she was constantly taking care of their children or doing household chores. Her traffickers frequently violated their verbal contract, which did not align with the written contract that they encouraged her to sign. Lipenga was often overworked, and subsequently abused when her work did not reach her traffickers' standards. Because her traffickers trapped her inside their home and disconnected the phones, she was isolated and unaware that there was help available to her.

Labor traffickers often target foreigners who have little to no knowledge of the U.S.'s legal system, language, and culture, and as a result are made to feel trapped and fear escape in a country which is so unfamiliar to them. Traffickers will often exploit the fact that immigrants,

especially from countries where English is not their national language, will struggle to adapt to and understand how the U.S. works as a country, and will use this to keep them in their control.

In Fainess Lipenga's account, she describes how she came to the U.S. from her hometown Malawi under the promise that she'd receive an education and a steady flow of income upon her arrival, which she hoped would support her family, her village, and herself. However, these guarantees were quickly revealed to her as false once she arrived at her trafficker's household, where she describes: "My employer took away my passport, locked me in the house and disconnected the phone whenever she left home. I was made to sleep on the basement floor. I was so isolated from the outside world that I had no idea there was help available" (Lipenga). By isolating Fainess from the outside world, her traffickers were simultaneously denying her the opportunity to make a life for herself in the U.S. As a result, she was not able to integrate into American society or learn about its culture or practices, which left her feeling trapped in a vicious cycle of trafficking: "Some people ask why I didn't leave. Well there were very real physical concerns. I had no money, no passport, and I didn't know anyone. I did not speak English very well" (Lipenga).

Traffickers will capitalize on foreigners unfamiliarity of the United States to maintain their power over them, and make them feel like they have no means of escape. Harold D'Souza was brought to the U.S. from India, and recounts how before his arrival, the image he had of America was a glorified and idealized one, where he believed it would be a "paradise" as "one of the most powerful countries in the world" (D'Souza). However, he faces a culture shock when he arrives and is denied the opportunity to immerse himself into American society:

Imagine that you wake up in a place where you don't know the culture, you don't know the laws, you don't know the people and you don't know the resources.

Imagine that you thought you were going for a better life for yourself and your family but find yourself on the floor with no bed.

For any common man to survive in the United States of America you need four things; (1) State ID. (2) Work Permit. (3) Social Security Card (SSN). (4) Freedom. (D'Souza)

Documentation is often taken from labor trafficking survivors by their perpetrators, thereby manipulating them to refrain from contacting law enforcement. Labor trafficking victims often fear deportation, especially when they have undocumented status, and a lack of physical, legal documents perpetuates that very worry. Yuri Guerrero's perpetrator stole her legal documents after trafficking her as a minor into the United States. Guerrero recounts how she felt entrapped by and to her trafficker as a result: "I tried to escape several times but when night fall came and I realized I did not have any documentation and nowhere to go" (Guerrero). Trafficked foreigners are often afraid to seek outside support following the various manipulation tactics their perpetrators use, and in a country that is completely new to them, that fear is amplified.

Deplorable living and working conditions, including isolation, starvation, and sleep deprivation, are imposed by traffickers as a means of physically and mentally incapacitating their victims while stripping them of their sense of self worth. This dehumanizing process is one which we've seen in Holocaust witness literature and slave narratives too, and one which perpetrators use to generate feelings of hopelessness among their victims. When Flor Molina was trafficked, her perpetrator denied her of basic rights such as adequate food, rest, and a suitable living space:

"I was forced to sleep at the factory in a storage room, and I had to share a single mattress with another victim... I was forbidden to talk to anyone or from putting one step



outside of the factory. I worked hard, and I was always hungry. I was given only one meal a day, and I had 10 minutes to eat. If I took longer, I was punished.” (Molina)

These deplorable conditions both physically and mentally incapacitate victims of labor trafficking, making it near impossible to escape. For the two anonymous victims in the agriculture industry, the inhumane working conditions would cause them and their coworkers to nearly faint regularly, as they describe the overall standards of living as “total neglect.” By denying labor trafficking victims of humane living and working conditions, perpetrators both physically and mentally incapacitated them as a means of preventing their escape.

Labor trafficking is not a new phenomenon in the United States, but one which has been slowly garnering more attention as the government and citizens alike are becoming more aware of this issue. Trafficking victims are often strategically targeted and exploited based on their foreign status and unfamiliarity of the United States, history of childhood trauma and abuse, and prior relationship with their trafficker. Traffickers will capitalize off of their victims' vulnerability by bringing them to the U.S. under false promises of fair employment and wages, stable housing, and an education. However, once victims have arrived in the U.S., these promises are quickly abolished, and instead met with deplorable living and working conditions which traumatize them into relying on their trafficker for survival and fearing escape. However, not all hope is lost; this issue is finally gaining attention, and we can be a part of that solution. In most testimonies, labor trafficking survivors have become activists within their communities and on a national scale, working to raise awareness and educate Americans on how to identify and prevent trafficking. Reading about the experiences of labor trafficking victims is the first step, and informing yourself about current legislation against it and its flaws, speaking out about this issue, and standing with the victims it has affected is a necessary continuation of bearing witness to it.

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