

Freedom Needs Truth

October 21, 2020

An open letter to Candidates, the Media, Political Parties, and Policymakers:

As survivors, service providers, human and labor rights advocates, law enforcement officials, researchers and policy experts, we know human trafficking is real. For decades we have worked to raise awareness, enforce the law with a victim centered approach, identify and aid survivors in their recovery, address underlying root causes, and establish policies to end this horrific crime. Our collective efforts have been aided by champions across the political spectrum. From Senators Sam Brownback and Paul Wellstone to Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, the bipartisan message has been clear:

You don't score political points on the backs of human trafficking survivors, and you don't lie about human trafficking to scare voters. We are in this together.

It is with this collective and collaborative history in mind that we say we are alarmed and deeply disturbed by the intentional spread of conspiracy theories and disinformation about sex trafficking with the aim of sowing fear and division in order to influence the upcoming election. **Anybody — political committee, public office holder, candidate, or media outlet — who lends any credibility to QAnon conspiracies related to human trafficking actively harms the fight against human trafficking.** Indeed, any political committee, candidate, public office holder or media that does not expressly condemn QAnon and actively debunk the lies should be held accountable.

Instead of actively propagating or silently condoning disinformation that harms trafficking victims and survivors and dismantles years of bipartisan cooperation, we offer the real facts about human trafficking.

The majority of trafficked youth have been abused or neglected, have run away or don't have stable housing, or are immigrant children fleeing violence in their home countries to seek refuge in the United States. They are the youth that we as a society have failed. They are not abducted by strangers or Hollywood elites — they are abandoned by failing and under-resourced systems. There is not a deep state cabal of Democratic politicians and Hollywood celebrities who traffic children for sex. No major political candidate or party supports or condones pedophilia or human trafficking.

We work on these issues. We would know. Any time we spend engaging these lies necessarily distracts from the real work needed to combat human trafficking, and there is a lot to do:

- We need policies that address systemic vulnerabilities of children to both sex trafficking and forced labor.
- We need more housing, social, legal and employment support for survivors and vulnerable youth.
- We need to invest in fixing the child welfare system, and building compassionate and robust responses so that meaningful support is available for any young person in need.
- We need to invest in better training, strengthen victim-centered investigations, and expand survivor access to alternative forms of justice.
- We need better data, and greater diplomatic engagement so that human trafficking doesn't get sidelined as a soft issue to be addressed after "real" foreign policy.
- We need an end to discriminatory practices against immigrants and communities of color.
- We need accountability for corporations who can figure out how to maximize profit but not how to protect their workers.
- We need funding and systems change that reflect these needs, not craven political messaging that ignores these realities in service of harmful lies.

As a diverse field, we acknowledge a spectrum of experiences, views, and approaches. We disagree a LOT. On this though, we stand UNITED and we reiterate: **Anybody — political committee, candidate, or media outlet — who lends any credibility to QAnon conspiracies related to human trafficking actively harms the fight against human trafficking.** This is an issue where Republicans and Democrats have historically put real differences aside in service of a greater truth: Americans stand united against human trafficking.

On behalf of an underfunded and nonpartisan field dedicated to ending this horrific form of exploitation and abuse and helping those who have survived it, we urge you to engage real needs rather than politically motivated and profoundly dangerous

narratives that harm the very people who they claim to be speaking for — victims, survivors, children, families and vulnerable communities.

Signed,

3Strands Global Foundation	Advocating Opportunity
Amara Legal Center	Ameinu
American Gateways	Americans for Immigrant Justice
Arizona State University Office of Sex Trafficking Research	ATEST (Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking)
The Avery Center for Research and Services	COALITION AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN
Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking	Community Legal Aid Society Inc. (CLASI)
Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants	Corporate Accountability Lab
The Exploitation Intervention Project	Foreign Policy for America
The Freedom Fund	Freedom Network USA
Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, Yale University	Give Way to Freedom
Global Center for Women and Justice Vanguard University	Global Fund to End Modern Slavery
Grace Farms Foundation	HEAL Trafficking
Heartland Alliance	HIAS Pennsylvania
Human Rights First	Human Trafficking Collorative Network
Human Trafficking Institute	The Human Trafficking Legal Center
Humanity United	HumanTraffickingData.org

Institute to Combat Trafficking	International Corporate Accountability Roundtable
International Institute of Buffalo	International Justice Mission
International Organization for Adolescents (IOFA)	International Women's Media Foundation
Jewish Women International	Justice At Last
Justice in Motion	Lantos Foundation for Human Rights & Justice
Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services	Liberty Shared
Love146	McCain Institute for International Leadership
Methodist LeBonheur Healthcare - North	Migration that Works
Mosaic Family Services	National Network for Youth
National Organization for Women, Hollywood Chapter	National Survivor Network
New England Coalition Against Trafficking	New Hampshire Human Trafficking Collaborative Task Force
North County Lifeline	North River Law PLLC
North Texas Academic Collaborative on Trafficking	Open Society Foundations
Phoenix Dream Center	Polaris
Preble Street	Project iRISE
Quinnipiac University School of Law Clinic	Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism	Rights4Girls
Sanctuary for Families	Shared Hope International
Solidarity Center	Stardust Fund
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights	Tivnu: Building Justice
U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking	Union for Reform Judaism
University of Maryland SAFE Center for Human Trafficking Survivors	Verite
Verity	VIDA Legal Assistance, Inc.
Volunteer Lawyers for Justice	WOMANKIND
Worker Justice Center of New York	YWCA Kalamazoo

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