



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

# FACT SHEET

November 19, 2008

## Human Trafficking and Smuggling

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the largest investigative agency, has responsibility for enforcing a wide range of crimes related to border security, including investigations of human trafficking and human smuggling. In fact, ICE is the federal government's lead agency with responsibility for combating human trafficking.

An estimated 800,000 men, women and children are trafficked across international borders each year, according to the U.S. Department of State. Victims are trafficked into the international sex trade and into forced labor situations throughout the world. Many of these victims are lured from their homes with false promises of well-paying jobs; instead, they are forced or coerced into prostitution, domestic servitude, farm or factory labor or other types of forced labor.

Victims often find themselves in a foreign country and cannot speak the language. Traffickers often take away the victims' travel and identity documents, telling them that if they attempt to escape, the victims or their families back home will be harmed, or the victims' families will assume the debt. We recognize that men, women and children that are encountered in brothels, sweat shops, massage parlors, agricultural fields and other labor markets may be forced or coerced into those situations and potentially are trafficking victims.

Trafficking vs. Smuggling

### ***Trafficking vs. Smuggling: What's the Difference?***

"Human trafficking" and "human smuggling" are distinct criminal activities, and the terms are not interchangeable. Human trafficking centers on exploitation and is generally defined as:

- Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or
- 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.

Human smuggling centers on transportation and is generally defined as:

- Importation of people into the United States involving deliberate evasion of immigration laws. This offense includes bringing illegal aliens into the country, as well as the unlawful transportation and harboring of aliens already in the United States.

## ***ICE's Role in Combating Trafficking and Smuggling***

ICE works with its law enforcement partners to dismantle the global criminal infrastructure engaged in human trafficking. ICE accomplishes this mission by making full use of its authorities and expertise, stripping away assets and profit incentive, collaborating with U.S. and foreign partners to attack networks worldwide and working in partnership with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to identify, rescue and provide assistance to trafficking victims.

### ***Victim-Centered Approach***

ICE recognizes that in order to successfully investigate and prosecute traffickers, victims must be stable and free from fear and intimidation to be effective witnesses. Equal value is placed on the identification and rescue of victims and the prosecution of traffickers. ICE has more than 300 collateral duty victim/witness coordinators who work with NGOs to assist in the provision of victim services. Short-term immigration relief is provided to certified victims of trafficking in the form of Continued Presence (CP) status.

### ***Recent Anti-Human Trafficking Successes***

**Sex Trafficking/San Antonio**—On June 1, 2007, a San Antonio woman and her two daughters were ordered detained without bond for engaging in sex trafficking of children. The woman, age 59, and her daughters, ages 32 and 29, were arrested and charged with sex trafficking of children by force, fraud or coercion. Based on the ongoing investigation and the victims' statements, it is alleged that the defendants traveled to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, to recruit young girls to work as prostitutes in the San Antonio area. The victims in this case were 15, 17 and 22 years old. After arriving in the United States, the victims were told they would have to work as prostitutes for five years to repay the money the defendants had spent. Allegedly the money was spent on smuggling and other expenses they incurred to prepare the young women to be prostitutes. The victims told ICE agents that they were scared to leave because a male associate of the Ochoa's had threatened them with a gun; he also stated that he could find them and their families back in Mexico, and he would have them killed. The female violators in this case received sentences of time served to 18 months in prison for their convictions for harboring and transporting aliens for financial gain. One of the male defendants was sentenced to 120 months in prison for conspiracy to transport aliens for financial gain and for aiding and abetting sex trafficking of a child. One remaining defendant is scheduled for jury trial in February 2009.

**Involuntary Servitude/Michigan**—On May 31, 2007, a couple from Cameroon was sentenced for involuntary servitude and related charges. Joseph Djoumessi, 49, was found guilty of conspiracy, involuntary servitude and harboring for financial gain. He was sentenced to 17 years in prison, to run concurrent with a 9-to-15-year sentence he is currently serving for a Michigan state conviction related to the same crime. A jury also convicted Djoumessi's wife, Evelyn Djoumessi, 42, of conspiracy and involuntary servitude. She was sentenced to five years in prison. The couple was also ordered to pay \$100,000 in restitution to the victim. ICE agents in Detroit began an investigation in 2000 after receiving information regarding a young girl who was possibly being held against her will. A 17-year-old girl from Cameroon was discovered in the Djoumessi home, living under a false identity and in questionable circumstances. The girl had been brought into the United States illegally when she was 14 years old. During the time the girl lived at the couple's home, she was forced "by beating and threats," according to court documents, to care for their children and perform household chores without pay. They also limited her contact with the outside world and did not permit her to attend school.

**Labor Trafficking/Long Island, N.Y.**—On May 13, 2007, Nassau County Police Department (NCPD) officers encountered a female subject disoriented and wandering around a residential neighborhood. The NCPD identified her as a possible trafficking victim and contacted ICE agents assigned to the Human Trafficking Task Force who interviewed the victim at the Nassau University Medical Center (NUMC). The victim indicated that she had escaped from a residence in Muttontown, N.Y., where she was forced to stay and work under horrific conditions. Doctors diagnosed the victim with extensive bruising, burns and lacerations, allegedly inflicted by her employer, Varsha Sabhnani. On the evening of May 13, 2007, ICE agents executed a federal search warrant at the residence in Muttontown and found another female domestic worker hiding in the basement. The second victim denied physical abuse, but witnessed the physical abuse inflicted upon the other victim. Both victims claimed that Sabhnani and her husband verbally abused them and restricted their movements at all times. On May 14, 2007, ICE agents arrested Mahender and Varsha Sabhnani who were subsequently indicted. On December 18, 2007, they were found guilty by jury of forced labor, peonage, document servitude, harboring aliens and conspiracy. In June 2008, Varsha Sabhnani was sentenced to 11 years imprisonment and her husband was sentenced to three years. The jury ordered that their residence, valued at \$1.5 million, be criminally forfeited. Proceeds from the sale of the residence will be used to pay restitution to the victims.

**Sex Trafficking/New York**—The Flores-Carreto family sex-trafficking ring operated between Tenancingo, Tlaxcala, Mexico, and Queens, New York, from 1991 to 2004 and involved brothels in the New York metropolitan area. ICE began its investigation in December 2003 after the mother of a trafficking victim reported to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City that her daughter had been kidnapped and was being held against her will in New York. ICE discovered that male members of the Flores-Carreto family romantically lured young Mexican women to the United States, where they were forced into prostitution through beatings and threats against their children, who were residing with the traffickers' mother in México. Victims who became pregnant were forced to have abortions. In April 2005, Josue Flores-Carreto, Gerardo Flores-Carreto and Daniel Perez Alfonso, a brothel manager, were sentenced to 50, 50, and 25 years imprisonment respectively, for multiple offenses related to forced prostitution. In January 2007, Mexico extradited Consuelo Carreto Valencia, the mother of the Carreto brothers, to the United States, where she was charged with conspiring on sex trafficking and related offenses. On July 22, 2008, she pled guilty to sex trafficking and is pending sentencing for that crime. The prosecution has been one of the largest sex trafficking cases brought under the provisions of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. The sentences in this case are the longest to date.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*