

SUSAN COPPEDGE
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
WASHINGTON, DC
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this hearing to consider my nomination as Ambassador-at-Large to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. I am honored by this opportunity to appear before you, as I am honored and humbled by the confidence President Obama and Secretary Kerry have placed in me to serve our nation in continuing the fight against human trafficking in the world.

I want to thank Kari Johnstone, Carl Fox, and the team at the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Kari has been Acting Director since Ambassador Luis CdeBaca, my former DOJ colleague, departed the office, and she has done a wonderful job. The entire TIP Office has their hearts in the fight against human trafficking and stands ready to help me settle into the State Department.

I want to acknowledge my husband, Lorenzo Amato, who has been so wonderfully supportive of me and whose love for me and our children enables me to undertake the awesome responsibility of the position for which I have been nominated. My father Warren Coppedge is also here; unfortunately my mother and brother could not be here and we thought it best if my daughter, Lilliana who is seven, and my son Sebastian, who is three, stayed home today. I could spend days telling you of the love, support and guidance my parents have given me and the innumerable ways that they have made me the person I am. I certainly inherited the gift of gab from both of them and also an understanding of how important it is to serve. This lesson is summarized by a bumper sticker my father has on his car: “whatever you do to the least of these, you also do to me.”

My parents instilled faith and a call to service in all of their children including my sister Elizabeth Coppedge Henley who is a Methodist minister and who is here today with her family, as are friends and colleagues from the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Atlanta, as well as friends and fellow classmates from both my undergraduate *alma mater* Duke University and my law

school, Stanford University. There is also a large group back in Atlanta and my hometown of Dalton, GA saying prayers for me and the work I hope to undertake, with the support and confirmation of the United States Senate.

I want to thank Senator Isakson for being here to introduce me to the committee today and to Senator Max Cleland who could not be here but has been a vocal supporter of mine. I hope the bipartisan support will continue through this Senate confirmation process and, hopefully, as we work together in the future.

As a federal prosecutor in the United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia, I have been dedicated to the fight against human trafficking for 14 years. In 2002, I tried my first human trafficking case, serving as second chair to my wonderful colleague Janis Gordon. This first case is an example of how a community can drive action on behalf of government officials. It started in 2000 with a juvenile court judge who wrote an editorial in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* decrying the "alarming increase" of the commercial sexual exploitation of girls based on her experience with 14, 15, and 16 year olds coming into her court on prostitution charges. These children's bonds to get them out of jail were paid repeatedly by the same group of men, and those men did not face any criminal repercussions themselves. The judge's editorial ignited a group of citizens to take up this issue and galvanized then U.S. Attorney Richard Deane and other dedicated law enforcement officials with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Atlanta Police Department. Thirteen human traffickers were indicted under federal charges; 11 pled guilty and two went to trial and were convicted by a jury. That was my first time meeting victims of modern slavery: teenagers who at 16 had been punished in juvenile court with a fine for prostitution and then released to the very traffickers who exploited them. I am so proud to have been a part of that first federal case in Atlanta and an advocate for justice for those young girls. This case earned the two most culpable traffickers prison sentences of 30 and 40 years and set me on the path to be here in front of you today.

Since then I have indicted 49 traffickers in cases involving both American and foreign-born children and young women, victims of both sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Over my career, I have worked on cases that have assisted more than 90 people in leaving their victimization and, in many cases, those individuals participated in the process of bringing their exploiters to justice. I have worked with federal, state and local law

enforcement in the fight against human trafficking. This meant, in the early days, conducting training for law enforcement as to what human trafficking was and the warning signs they might see. It also meant partnering with nongovernmental organizations, faith groups, and concerned citizens in Georgia who provided services to victims of trafficking by helping them find safe housing, finish school or obtain their GEDs, and apply for visas provided by the U.S. government to foreign-born victims of trafficking. Finally, it has meant educating jurors and judges that modern slavery often does not involve locks on the doors or victims who come forward, but more subtle forms of exploitation and coercion that cause victims to be deprived of their freedom, their ability to say “no, I don’t want to do this work.”

Even though I may sound a bit regional to those Senators not from Tennessee or Georgia, I have been engaged on the frontlines in the very anti-trafficking efforts the State Department encourages foreign governments to pursue. Based on my extensive experience combating trafficking here in the United States, I have trained foreign law enforcement in Argentina, New Zealand, and Thailand. I have also worked with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to develop a database for tracking human trafficking prosecutions. The message I always seek to deliver, whether to foreign governments or to the Rotary Club, is that human trafficking cases are some of the most important cases that governments can undertake; these cases restore the individuals to the freedom and liberty to which all are entitled.

The U.S. goal, which I know this committee is so dedicated to supporting, is to ensure the internationally recognized right of individual freedom and the dignity of all persons. Human trafficking in all its forms – whether forced labor or sex trafficking – is modern slavery, and it is one of the greatest human rights causes of our time. We must undertake our responsibility as modern day abolitionists with energy and commitment to stop this heinous crime and to address the conditions such as conflict, poverty, and discrimination that contribute to making individuals vulnerable to enslavement.

With President Obama, Secretary Kerry, and Under Secretary Sewall we have leaders in the executive branch deeply committed to this agenda. We also have strong leadership on this committee from Senator Corker and Senators Menendez, Cardin, Rubio and others who have kept the fight against human trafficking a priority for the Senate. I am well aware that the strong leadership of an Ambassador-at-Large is more important now than

ever, and we should continue our efforts to combat human trafficking and lift up those who have suffered in its grip. Not only is it simply the right thing to do, it will also enable the United States to continue to lead on this important issue.

Thus—

If confirmed, I commit to using this position passionately to advocate for the rights of individuals to be free from forced labor or sex trafficking, for victims of human trafficking to have access to comprehensive services, for survivors to be empowered to have a voice in policy, and for an end to the trafficking of human beings.

If confirmed, I will seek to engage every segment of the State Department and the rest of the U.S. government to integrate anti-trafficking policies into our nation's foreign policy goals: promoting open, resilient, and democratic societies, advancing inclusive economic growth, and preventing and mitigating conflict and violent extremism. Fighting human trafficking should be an integral part of all our engagements with other governments to further our nation's values of freedom and liberty.

If confirmed, I pledge to do my utmost to uphold the integrity of the annual *Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report* and its tier rankings, including by ensuring the facts from the field are accurately presented in the report.

The annual *TIP Report* is respected around the world and used in countless countries to try to increase prosecutions of the exploiters, enhance protections for the survivors, and encourage prevention of this crime. Thanks to the hearing held by this Committee in August, foreign governments will know that the United States Senate and U.S. citizens are deeply concerned about human trafficking. This will only help to encourage countries to make real progress in fighting human trafficking, as I hope to do.

If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with the many nongovernmental organizations and stakeholders already in this arena who successfully raise awareness, support prosecutions, and offer services to survivors.

If confirmed, I will partner with those in the business community who are deeply concerned with the treatment of workers in their supply chains and

who seek strong legal regimes and policies that ensure humane labor practices and facilitate fair markets.

Lastly, if confirmed, I will do everything within my abilities to maintain a close working relationship with Congress and with those federal agencies engaged in the fight against human trafficking.

I would like to close with the story of Carolina. Carolina is a survivor I had the chance to know while I prosecuted her trafficker. She was 16 when Juan Cortes Meza romanced her in Mexico. He promised her that a better life awaited her in the United States, a life where he would marry her and they could make a living cleaning houses or selling clothes. Instead, Cortes Meza smuggled Carolina across the border and then gave her the most shocking news of her life – that he expected her to sleep with 20-30 men a night. He forced her into his high-volume, low-cost prostitution business. At first, Cortes Meza said it would only last until she paid back the smuggling debt. Then he told her it was the only way she could earn money in a country where law enforcement would not help her and she would end up in jail. Then, when his deception and coercion were not sufficient, he beat her to force her to continue.

I had the privilege of being with Carolina as she bravely spoke to the federal judge who heard her case. I listened as she shared her pain and described how she cried every night. “Only the walls heard my cries,” she said. That day at trial, Atlanta heard Carolina. Today, I share her story in the U.S. Senate and the United States hears Carolina. Every victim’s pain is our nation’s pain as well. The indelible memory of Carolina’s cries - and of survivors like her - fuels my commitment to anti-trafficking work. A commitment to human dignity is a commitment to a just world. There are many people in this room and listening today who are as passionate as I am. Each of us plays a part in this connected fight in helping survivors worldwide, and in supporting governments, nongovernmental organizations, and citizens to end modern slavery. I look forward to working with the members of this committee and others in our shared fight.

Thank you again for your consideration and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.