

Statement of John Cotton Richmond
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador-at-Large to Monitor and
Combat Trafficking in Persons
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
August 1, 2018

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Menendez, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this hearing to consider my nomination to be the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. I am honored and humbled by the confidence President Trump and Secretary Pompeo have placed in me to serve our nation in this position.

As I begin, I want to thank Kari Johnstone and the team at the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Kari has been Acting Director for over a year while the office operated without an Ambassador and she and the team have done a wonderful job.

I want to acknowledge that for the last 18 years the Office has stood as the leading government office in the battle against traffickers. I am grateful for the work of the prior five leaders of the Office: Ambassadors Nancy Ely-Raphel, John Miller, Mark Lagon, Luis CdeBaca, and Susan Coppedge. Bridging multiple administrations, they have guided this movement. Unfortunately, Ambassador Miller passed away last year after a courageous battle against cancer. I am grateful that the other four living former Trafficking Ambassadors have offered their support, wise counsel, and guidance, should I be confirmed.

I am also thankful that my wife, of twenty-five years, is here with me. The Lovely and Talented Linda Marie, along with our three bright, courageous, and spirited children, Grace-Lauren, James, and Mount, have made continued sacrifices for me to engage in this work. Their support and prayers enable me to assume the awesome responsibility of this position, if confirmed.

I also want to thank my parents, who unfortunately could not be here today. They instilled in me a strong work ethic, a clear sense of justice, and a sustained empathy for the vulnerable. I am also grateful to have friends from High School, College, and Law School here today. Since we were kids we have weathered life together. To have friends that last a lifetime is a blessing, and I have been uncommonly blessed.

My introduction to modern slavery occurred early in my legal career when I was practicing law in Virginia. International Justice Mission, a relatively new anti-trafficking organization at that time, invited me to pioneer an office in South India. Soon my wife, who was 8 months pregnant at the time, our 14-month-old daughter, and I found ourselves on a plane to India. I worked there for just over 3 years, tackling labor trafficking in agricultural fields, brick kilns, rice mills, and other facilities. Working on trafficking cases in India impressed upon me the primary reason this work is essential – the fact that every person has inherent value – that all people matter.

The Declaration of Independence begins with the foundational principle: that all have been endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights. The women and men who choose to commit the crime of trafficking in persons work to alienate people from those rights.

The Constitution's 13th Amendment specifically outlawed slavery and in 2000, through the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, Congress expanded protections, in response to traffickers' modern strategies to deny individuals' freedom. C.S. Lewis wrote, "The freedom of a creature must mean freedom to choose and choice implies the existence of things to choose between." Modern traffickers specifically work to deny people the option to choose. Many victims do not get to decide when they wake up, where they work, or who touches their bodies.

When our time in India was over, I continued in the battle against trafficking at the U.S. Department of Justice. For over a decade, I served as a federal prosecutor, investigating and prosecuting victim-centered labor trafficking and sex trafficking cases. The year after I joined DOJ, I was honored to be selected as a founding member of the Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit. My work at DOJ included the United Nations portfolio, working on the implementation of Palermo Protocol and training nonprofits, law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges throughout the world. Several of my fellow prosecutors are here today. We have been in the trenches together working cases in a victim-centered, trauma informed way to secure convictions against some of the worst traffickers in the United States and seeing the inspiring resiliency of survivors.

Almost two and a half years ago, I stepped down from my position at DOJ to launch the Human Trafficking Institute, with other experienced trafficking prosecutors and law enforcement professionals. With a deep bench of talent, the Institute is working on long-term projects to improve the delivery system of justice. My colleagues at the Human Trafficking Institute have graciously encouraged me to appear before you here today and, if confirmed, re-enter public service.

Collaborating with survivors is critical to combating human trafficking. Throughout my work, survivors have taught me a great deal. Survivor voices are key to developing effective anti-trafficking policy. I have also learned from the women and men who commit this crime and I have gained valuable insights into their methods and motivations.

Traffickers benefit from persistent myths. For instance, far too often media representations about trafficking ignore the existence of adult victims, labor trafficking victims, and those who are exploited within our own borders. Crimes of movement, like human smuggling, become conflated with crimes of coercion, like human trafficking. These areas of confusion benefit traffickers because they inhibit victim identification.

Traffickers also benefit from low rates of prosecution. Many operate with impunity. Meanwhile, human trafficking victims are ones to fear prosecution. Too often they are prosecuted for the unlawful acts their trafficker requires them to commit. The "non-

prosecution of victims” principle must be turned into a promise and we must fulfill that promise. Survivors should receive tailored services, not time behind bars. I am grateful for the several survivors who are here today.

This is a special time in history to be combating trafficking. For almost 2000 years, there was some form of legal slavery in the world. However, in the last 200 years that has completely changed, as every country in the world now has some sort of law against slavery. This is a massive historic hinge and the door of freedom is poised to swing wide.

The question for us in this moment of history, is whether we can extend the parchment protections of law to the victims in need of those protections. Millions of exploited people all over the world are waiting for the answer to that question. The TIP Office occupies a critical role in providing the answer.

- If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to fulfill the Declaration’s self-evident truth, the 13th Amendment’s mandate, and the Trafficking Victim Protection Act’s promise.
- If confirmed, I will bring to office my experience working international and domestic trafficking cases, labor and sex trafficking cases, involving minors, adults, citizens, and foreign nationals from around the world.
- If confirmed, I will work to ensure the continued integrity of the TIP Report, the gold standard in diplomatic tools for engaging governments on human trafficking.
- If confirmed, I will passionately advocate for the rights of individuals to be free from traffickers and for survivors to have access services to help them recover and rebuild.

Working collaboratively with U.S. and foreign government officials, nonprofits, this Committee, and the rest of Congress, we will answer the question and deliver the law’s protection allowing victims to step into freedom as survivors, because all people matter.

Thank you for considering me to represent our country in this effort, and I welcome your questions.