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Contact: Annick Febrey—(202) 888-7608—febrey@humanrightsfirst.org

Testimony of Annick Febrey, Senior Associate, Anti-Trafficking Campaign  
Human Rights First

New York City Council  
Committee on Immigration

Oversight Hearing: Labor Trafficking in the Domestic Worker Industry- Resources for Victims in  
New York City

Good afternoon Chairman Menchaca and distinguished members of the committee. I am Annick Febrey, senior associate for Human Rights First's anti-trafficking campaign. Thank you for hosting this important hearing and for your continued work on behalf of vulnerable workers.

Human Rights First is an independent advocacy organization that challenges America to live up to its ideals. We are a non-profit, nonpartisan international human rights organization based in New York and Washington, D.C. For more than 35 years, we've built bipartisan coalitions and teamed up with frontline activists, lawyers and businesses to tackle human rights issues that demand American leadership. It's this approach that we bring to our anti-trafficking campaign focused on disrupting the business of modern slavery.

We join the other organizations here today who are doing critical work around victim assistance in their call for enhanced support for those services. In addition to making sure these victims find safety and are provided the relevant services, we also need to ensure that for every victim rescued, they aren't replaced by a new victim.

Slavery is the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world. Ending it will require the cooperation of all levels of government, business, law enforcement, and civil society to dismantle the \$150 billion criminal enterprise. Because human trafficking is a profit-driven enterprise in which perpetrators operate with relative impunity, successful strategies to combat it must focus on increasing the risks for the perpetrators and enablers, and decreasing the profits. While the International Labour Organization estimates that nearly 21 million people are enslaved globally, the State Department's most recent annual Trafficking in Persons report

states that fewer than 9,500 human trafficking cases were prosecuted worldwide in 2013, resulting in less than 6,000 reported convictions.

There are protections that we can put in place so that workers never become vulnerable in the first place. Many people often associate trafficking as something that happens overseas, faraway. The truth is it happens everywhere across the globe, including in the United States and here in New York. But there's a lot we can learn from experiences internationally that can help us combat trafficking here locally. I've spent time in Tamil Nadu and Kerala in South India, working with families that have been trapped in slavery in rice mills and brick kilns. They are in search of or offered a decent job, but only if they pay a large fee upfront to get the job. They're promised decent wages, housing, and reasonable hours so they take out a loan, calculating that they'll be able to pay back the recruitment fee in a matter of months. Then they find themselves forced to endure back-breaking work for 14, 16, sometimes 18 hours a day. They're paid little or no salary, often under the guise of owing their employer for their housing provided. This housing, mind you, is sometimes no more than a 10-foot by 10-foot cement room where a family of five is expected to live. Children are kept from school and the families aren't allowed to leave the property. I've also met men who returned from working on U.S. military bases. They had a similar story—after being promised a high paying job in the hospitality industry in Doha or Dubai, they pay a fee to a recruiter and take off only to find themselves stuck in a combat zone working on a U.S. military base for little to no pay, with no access to their immigration documents, and no proof that they're there legally. Often they've signed over their home as collateral for the loan so they have no choice but to stay and work. These stories are no different from what workers often endure when they come to the United States for domestic work, and other industries.

New federal regulations that are meant to protect workers on U.S. contracts can be applied at all levels of government to protect workers in a variety of industries. In particular, we should require companies to provide an awareness training that's mandatory for all employees regarding recognizing trafficking-related activities and what to do if they suspect someone is a victim. Additionally, companies should provide a grievance process for employees to report, without fear of retaliation, any trafficking-related incidents. Companies should only use recruitment agencies that prohibit charging the workers any recruitment fees and workers should have a written copy of their contract, in advance, that details where they will be working, for how many hours per week, and at what salary.

Domestic workers are particularly vulnerable given that existing federal regulations that typically protect workers don't apply. One additional challenge in addressing labor trafficking—and especially in the domestic work industry—is that it's hard to spot. There are misconceptions that trafficking requires movement of a victim, or is often confused with smuggling and in general it's easier to investigate sex trafficking cases. Across the country, we all need to get on the same page about labor trafficking what it is, how to recognize it, and how to best serve victims once identified. We recommend training for all relevant city officials and employees to recognize trafficking and to know who to call when they identify potential victims. Further, law

enforcement and service providers need to be coordinated at all levels- federal, state, local and tribal. Without a comprehensive approach to combatting trafficking—especially with the harder to spot types such as domestic work—we'll never keep pace with the crime.

In addition, we recommend adopting a public education campaign that will raise awareness about this issue among New York City residents. Victims of human trafficking in the domestic work industry often have few interactions with law enforcement and city employees in general. Yet, New York City residents and their communities can play a central role in identifying and reporting incidents of human trafficking. This also provides an opportunity to partner with businesses to share trainings and best practices on raising awareness and reporting.

We need to make sure that there are fewer than 21 million people enslaved in years to come. To do that, we need to make it riskier for the perpetrator which means better understanding the crime and how to recognize it, and better coordinating across jurisdictions so that more traffickers are prosecuted and convicted.

We are grateful to the New York City Council and the Committee on Immigration for the opportunity to testify here today on the important issue of labor abuses in the domestic worker industry. Slavery is a shameful part of our nation's history and we look forward to working with you to see that it has no place in its future.

Thank you.