

You Are Not Alone: Hispanic Human Trafficking Public Awareness Campaign

Problem Statement

The U.S. State Department defines trafficking in persons as “modern-day slavery involving victims who are forced, defrauded or coerced into labor or sexual exploitation” (December 7, 2005). While numerous governmental and international organizations recognize human trafficking as a significant problem, the extent of the epidemic remains difficult to quantify. The fact that there exists no rigid definition of trafficking, coupled with the inherent difficulties of measuring an underground activity, means that official estimates of human trafficking vary widely (IOM, 2005). The State Department estimates 600,000 to 800,000 human beings are trafficked across international borders annually (December 7, 2005).

The State Department ranks countries that experience human trafficking (either as source or recipient countries) according to a three-tiered system ranging from Tier 1 countries, which adhere to basic standards of trafficking prevention and prosecution, to Tier 3 countries, which show no effort to control the problem. In Latin America, 21 countries are designated as experiencing significant human trafficking. Of these, only one, Colombia, is recognized with a Tier 1 placement. Eleven countries are categorized as Tier 2; five are Tier 2 watch-listed (meaning their Tier 2 status is in question); and four—Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, and Venezuela—are categorized as Tier 3 (USDS, June 2005).

U.S. Hispanics currently form the largest minority group in the United States, constituting approximately 40 million individuals or 14% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Census 2000 reports that 8% of the Washington, D.C. population is Hispanic—with 45,000 individuals living within the corporate boundaries of the District—and this percentage is rapidly growing. While statistics on how many members of this poor and sometimes extra-legal population currently find themselves in positions of sexual bondage or involuntary servitude are not available, according to Break the Chain, a community-based organization (CBO) whose mission focuses on assisting enslaved domestic workers, “lawyers, church and social workers, and others involved in handling complaints estimate that there are hundreds, perhaps thousands of exploited and abused foreign domestics in the Washington area” (2006).

Numerous factors may prevent members of the Hispanic community—both victims and witnesses to human trafficking, so-called “good Samaritans”—from seeking help for the problem. Besides being unaware of the legal frameworks and community services in place to assist them, victims may also be afraid of the consequences of reporting. In some cases, victims may worry that, if they seek help, their friends or family members will be harmed. In other cases, victims and Samaritans alike may worry about their legal status in the United States and the possibility of being deported (USDS, 2005). In addition, a general distrust of the government among Hispanics—whether due to cultural values, ignorance of U.S. systems, or personal histories of governmental abuse—is well-documented (Advocates for Youth, 1994) (Peña, 2003) (Fenton et al, 1996).

To a significant extent, concerns about reporting to the federal government are justified. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, for example, warns that CBOs must be able to screen clients rigorously regarding their personal situations and provide them with careful legal advice concerning the risks of reporting. Not all exploited Hispanics in the D.C. area will meet the legal requirements for human trafficking. For example, some individuals may actually be considered “smuggled” or “exploited workers.” Other individuals may or may not meet the standards to be classified as refugees (2006). Only through a careful legal intake interview can a service provider ascertain what forms of legal relief are appropriate for a particular client.

In many ways, Washington, D.C. provides a unique venue for developing a human trafficking public awareness campaign. A city with a growing Hispanic population and a thriving CBO community, the District of Columbia is also the nation’s capital. As such, Washington, D.C. hosts U.S. federal agencies, international organizations, embassies, consulates, and missions to the United States. While conducting a local media campaign to serve the numerous victims of human trafficking in the Washington, D.C. area, the Self Reliance Foundation and its community partners will also be able to tap into the resources of the many national and international organizations in the city concerned with finding better approaches to rescue victims of human trafficking.

The You Are Not Alone (*No Estás Sola/No Estás Solo*) public awareness campaign will work with Hispanic-serving CBOs and Hispanic-serving members of the Department of Justice (DOJ) D.C. Task Force on Trafficking in Persons to ensure these organizations’ activities receive the best possible media coverage and make the strongest possible impact within the D.C. Hispanic community. The campaign will follow a standard social marketing “air and ground” approach, combining mass media messages with task force members’ direct community outreach to connect previously isolated victims of human trafficking to the rescue services they need. (See campaign logic model in Section 4, Figure A). Funding for this campaign will be devoted entirely to public awareness products and services. All staff time is being donated pro bono. A detailed description of campaign partners and services is provided in Section 4.