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Statement of Congressman John Lewis (GA)

On the Introduction of the Congressional Commission on the Abolition of Modern Day Slavery Act

Madam Speaker, I rise today with my colleagues, Representatives Chris Smith, Carolyn Maloney and Thelma Drake to introduce a very important piece of legislation, the Congressional Commission on the Abolition of Modern-Day Slavery Act.

The United States abolished slavery in the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, however, slavery continues around the world and we must seek ways to end the suffering. This bill will establish a highly qualified and bi-partisan commission to make recommendations on what the United States can do to eradicate slavery in all corners of the Earth.

According to the International Labor Organization, more than 12.3 million people are victims of forced labor worldwide. Free the Slaves, a non-governmental organization, estimates that upwards of 27 million people are slaves today. The U.S. Government says that there are more than 14,500 people trafficked into labor or sex exploitation in the United States each year; perhaps hundreds of thousands of Americans are also trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation right here in their own country. Each of these individuals is a modern-day slave.

Modern-day slavery takes many forms, most often different from the images found in our own history. Rather than owning their slaves outright as in years past, the 21st century slaveholders use threats, violence and psychological coercion to keep slaves in dangerous and degrading working conditions with little or no pay. In countries around the world, slaves can be found in many labor-intensive industries, including the agricultural, commercial sex, construction, garment, manufacturing and service industries, as well as in domestic service.

To develop U.S. policy to end this man-made tragedy requires a thoughtful analysis of the factors contributing to slavery, a coordinated strategy among government agencies, and the political commitment of foreign governments to pursue an end to slavery and an end to the impunity of slave holders. The Congressional Commission on the Abolition of

Modern-Day Slavery would start this effort by examining best practices to prevent modern-day slavery, examining the effectiveness of U.S. laws prohibiting the importation of goods manufactured or produced through forced labor or child labor, examine U.S. policies and relations with countries that tolerate modern-day slavery, increase education and awareness about modern-day slavery, make recommendations to Congress on actions necessary to combat and eliminate modern-day slavery in all its forms, and more.

It is time to end the exploitation of people around the world. The U.S. Congress has the responsibility to study ways the United States can end modern forms of slavery and this commission will be the first step. There is no place in our world for slavery. Let's work to end it now!

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