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For Immediate Release

Contact: [Steve Walker](#), (619) 531-3890
[Tanya Sierra](#), (619) 531-3315
[Jesse Navarro](#), (619) 531-3053

En Español

District Attorney, US Attorney Join DOJ and other Law Enforcement Partners to Form Human Trafficking Task Force

Task Force will Identify and Rescue Victims, Expand Prosecution

San Diego County District Attorney [Bonnie M. Dumanis](#) and 14 partnering prosecution and law enforcement agencies announced a powerful countywide task force today that will confront human trafficking head-on by identifying and rescuing victims and connecting them with vital services. The San Diego Violent Human Trafficking & Child Exploitation Task Force (VHTCE) will bring together the combined and collaborative force of local, state and federal law enforcement to investigate and prosecute organized human trafficking operations. The VHTCE task force is fittingly making its debut in January, which is Human Trafficking Awareness and Prevention Month.

“When America’s finest city makes the FBI’s list as one of worst places for child prostitution, every member of our community needs to pay attention,” DA Dumanis said. “Human trafficking is the biggest human rights violation of our time and traffickers are using social media to recruit girls from San Ysidro to San Marcos. This new task force is set up to make serious strides in dismantling and disrupting human trafficking rings.”

While San Diego law enforcement agencies have been cooperating well over the past few years to fight the increase in human trafficking, this new task force represents the first time that local, state and federal agencies will have representatives all working together, sharing information and coordinating various operations in a centralized location. Human trafficking is a crime without jurisdictional borders in which victims can be moved from one city to another to maximize profit for the trafficker. The Internet has also become a favorite tool for recruiting and selling victims. This task force addresses those challenges by facilitating investigations and victim rescue in every area of the county.

The San Diego County Board of Supervisors with the leadership of Supervisor Dianne Jacob, along with DA Dumanis and Sheriff Bill Gore formed the San Diego Regional Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Advisory Council. The Council provides recommendations for implementing a model approach to the threat of human trafficking

in our region. This includes the four Ps of prevention, protection, prosecution and partnerships. In October 2014, the council issued a report of recommendations that was adopted by the Board of Supervisors. The priority was to create a centralized county and regional human trafficking task force to focus primarily on investigating human trafficking. Today's launch of the VHTCE is San Diego County's implementation of the most critically recommended action.

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery where perpetrators profit from the sexual exploitation and forced labor of men, women and children. It is a violation of basic human rights, and is a federal and state crime. It is defined as exploitation by force, fraud, fear or coercion of vulnerable people for mandatory labor, domestic servitude or commercial sex operations. The most common form of sex trafficking is using girls and young women for prostitution. Labor trafficking in construction, domestic servitude, restaurants and agriculture are prevalent forms of trafficking as well.

The FBI has designated San Diego County as a 'high intensity child prostitution area.' It is important for the public to realize children being forced into selling their bodies are victims of child sexual abuse and the acts have reached national epidemic proportions.

In San Diego County, prosecutions have more than tripled over the past five years. In 2009, the DA's Office prosecuted nine cases under sex trafficking statutes; in 2013 that number jumped to 43. Through November of last year, the DA's Office filed 31 human trafficking-related cases.

The VHTCE task force will attack human trafficking and child exploitation organizations through a comprehensive, collaborative and regional response. It will identify and rescue victims and hold their offenders accountable by creating a coordinated law enforcement system to investigate and prosecute offenders. That includes identifying and disrupting emerging trends involving domestic and transnational criminal organizations.

Human trafficking has become a \$32 billion-a-year global industry and is one of the fastest growing criminal enterprises. California is one of the top four destination states and San Diego ranks nine among 'high intensity child prostitution areas'.

"It's a cruel fact: We've got gangs right here in San Diego County engaged in a form of slavery," said San Diego County Supervisor Dianne Jacob. "This must end. The new multi-agency task force will tackle human trafficking head-on so criminals can no longer prey on our teenage girls and young women."

The Department of Homeland Security echoed Supervisor Jacob's sentiment.

"Human trafficking is a heinous and dehumanizing crime that cannot be tolerated in our communities," said Joe Garcia, interim special agent in charge for Homeland Security Investigations. "We are committed to working with our law enforcement partners on this critical task force to build upon our successes in combating human trafficking and defeating the violent criminals and criminal organizations that profit from the misery of others"

Other partner agencies said:

"Our office prioritizes enforcement actions and works closely with its local, state and federal partners to promote public safety, said Gregory J. Archambeault, field office director for ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations San Diego. "These egregious criminals are the highest priority and will find no haven in our communities"

The California Department of Justice, Bureau of Investigation, San Diego Violent Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation Task Force is a cooperative effort involving the California Highway Patrol, Coronado Police Department, Escondido Police Department, Federal Bureau of Investigations, ICE/Enforcement and Removal Operations, ICE/Homeland Security Investigations, La Mesa Police Department, Oceanside Police Department, San Diego City Attorney's Office, San Diego District Attorney's Office, Attorney General's Office, San Diego Probation Department, San Diego Sheriff's Department, San Diego Police Department, U.S. Marshals??, and the U.S. Attorney's Office.

*The goal of the VHTCE is to create a coordinated law enforcement system to investigate and prosecute these crimes, as well as identify, rescue, and provide support to victims through social and legal networks. If you or someone you know is the victim of human trafficking, please call the **National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1-888-373-7888 or text BeFree 233733.***

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