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For Immediate Release

Hawaii Anti-Trafficking Task Force Formed *Group Seeks Additional Members for Broader Coalition*

Honolulu – May 28, 2003 -- The Hawaii Anti-Trafficking Task Force (ATTF) held its first meeting in May and has charted a course to help fight modern day slavery.

There is currently no data on human trafficking in Hawaii, but given Hawaii's mid-Pacific location and the presence of a major tourism industry and military bases, ATTF members agree Hawaii is a likely trafficking transit or destination site.

The ATTF seeks to educate victims and law enforcement personnel that human trafficking is a violation of international and U.S. law and is prohibited for forced labor and mistreatment. New federal laws provide options for trafficking victims regardless of immigration status.

If someone is being forced to work or held against her or his will – whether they are immigrants or U.S. citizens -- their human rights are being violated and new laws will protect them. The ATTF stresses that it is illegal to use force or threats to make someone work to pay off a debt.

The U.S. Justice Department has set up a multilingual HOTLINE available for those who think they are being exploited: **1-888-428-7581**.

Trafficking in persons involves the recruitment, transport, and often sale, of individuals exploited for their labor as prostitutes, sweatshop workers, agricultural workers, maids and garment workers.

The Hawaii Anti Trafficking Task Force is composed of researchers, immigrant service providers, law enforcement, and women's rights advocates. ATTF is seeking to expand with representation from businesses and labor unions, the military and churches, as well as concerned individual citizens.

The group will initially focus on collecting data about the extent of trafficking in the region, raising awareness among the general public and key

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immigrant populations, and training law enforcement and public service personnel to recognize and deal with cases of human trafficking, according to Dr. Nancie Caraway. Caraway is Director of Women's Human Rights Projects at the Globalization Research Center, University of Hawaii-Manoa.

“Trafficking is a labor problem, a public-health problem, a gender issue, a migration problem and a global criminal problem,” she said. “It is essential to address the ‘push’ factors of poor, developing countries that lead people into modern-day slavery, but also the ‘pull’ factors of the demand in the developed countries of the world. Our own consumer habits can fuel global slavery.”

Another member of the ATTF, Boisse Correa, Assistant Chief of Police, Honolulu Police Department, noted that Hawaii law enforcers and social service agencies could build on the framework of education and action that brought domestic violence against women to the public's attention some 20 years ago. Trafficking in persons is a violation of international and U.S. law, but is not widely understood as a human rights violation by law enforcement and customs officials.

International trafficking in human beings has gained attention in Hawaii because of the “Daewoosa case” in which the owner of a clothing factory in American Samoa was found guilty of keeping 250 Vietnamese immigrant workers in involuntary servitude. Sentencing in the case, called the largest human-trafficking case investigated by the FBI and prosecuted by the U.S. Department of Justice, is expected in Federal Court here in Honolulu in July.

The Hawaii ATTF hopes to take advantage of the presence of a number of federal prosecutors who will be in Honolulu in July for the sentencing to raise awareness and conduct training on the issues relating to human trafficking, which is believed to impact 50,000 persons – mostly women and children – in the U.S. each year.

With the passage by the U.S. Congress of “The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000,” the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice has intensified its efforts and, working with the U.S. Attorneys Offices around the country, has charged, convicted or secured sentences for over 92 human trafficking in 21 cases.

Also, the 2003 Hawaii State Legislature overwhelmingly passed HB 135 which allows women who are interested in becoming mail-order brides through for-profit matchmaking services based in Hawaii to access criminal conviction and marital history information about prospective spouses. The bill, now

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awaiting the governor’s signature, was introduced by ATTF member Rep. Marilyn Lee and the bipartisan House women’s caucus. Mail-order brides are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and are often held in bondage and have their passports taken by abusive husbands.

The Hawaii ATTF is an outgrowth of an international humanitarian conference held in Hawaii last November. The Globalization Research Center of the University of Hawaii at Manoa organized the meeting called “The Human Rights Challenge of Globalization in Asia-Pacific-U.S.: The Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.” Three hundred human rights experts from Asia-Pacific attended the conference to formulate strategies to combat the dehumanizing practice which proliferates in Southeast and South Asia particularly.

The Hawaii ATTF plans to collaborate with other similar task forces across the country, including in Los Angeles, New York, Dallas and Seattle.

The Hawaii ATTF is inspired by the model of Washington State where state legislators, led by Representative Velma Veloria and the governor, passed the nation's first state anti-trafficking legislation--and set up a victim resources system, and a task force to combat human

trafficking. Along with other states, Florida has also created the Florida Trafficking Initiative, as part of the Center for the Advancement of Human Rights at Florida State University.

The Globalization Research Center (GRC) is a research unit of the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Established in 1998, the GRC conducts research on the dynamics and effects of globalization, with an emphasis on impacts within the Asia and Pacific region. The GRC is currently supported by a Congressionally-authorized grant administered by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) of the U.S. Department of Education.

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