

**United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health and Human Rights
“Best Practices and Next Steps: A New Decade in the Fight Against Human
Trafficking”**

**Statement presented by
Deborah Cundy
Vice President, Carlson**

June 13, 2011

**Chairman Smith,
Ranking Member Payne,
Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee**

Thank you for the honor to testify on an issue that threatens the well being of every society on our planet – human trafficking.

One of the most frustrating aspects of trafficking for us all is that it’s difficult to put metrics around it given its underground nature. But there is much that we do know. And increasingly, many in business feel that given what we know, we must act. We know human trafficking is one of the largest illicit activities in the world. And we know that, for the most part, it affects the most vulnerable among us – the poor, the uneducated, the women and the children.

We also know that it is projected to yield the traffickers \$32 billion in annual revenue. That’s the dark side. But there are also rays of light: We know that in just one decade of focused efforts since the Palermo Protocol of 2000 and the historic Trafficking Victims Protection Act, we have made significant progress – particularly when it comes to awareness building among the public at large, and in recent years, we’ve been encouraged by the increasing number of partnerships being forged across sectors to solve this complex issue.

As background to my company’s involvement in combating the sexual exploitation of children in tourism, it might be helpful for you to know that Carlson is a privately-held, 73-year old travel and hospitality company which has a presence in 150 countries.

Our hotel brands include Radisson Hotels, Country Inn & Suites, Park Inn and Park Plaza – most of these are franchised properties. We are also a majority owner in The Rezidor Hotel Group which operates our brands in Europe, Africa and the Middle East and is publically traded on European stock exchanges. There are, in total, about 1,077 hotels operating under a Carlson brand employing more than 70,000 people. Other Carlson companies include Carlson Wagonlit Travel (the world’s largest travel management company) and T.G.I. Friday’s restaurants. But for today’s purposes, I’ll focus on the hotel operations.

In 2004, Carlson was approached by the U.S. State Department to sign what is known as the travel industry’s Code of Conduct to protect children from sexual exploitation. We were shocked to learn that at any moment in time, more than 2 million children are being sexually abused.

In the travel industry, this abuse is sometimes played out in hotels at tourism sites around the world. There are hotels that are complicit in these activities but often they are unwitting facilitators.

The Code of Conduct basically asks that the signatory train its employees in what to look for and how to report it so that the employee base becomes a virtual army of eyes and ears. The Code asks that the signatory raise awareness among its customers, that it includes language in its supplier contracts and corporate ethics policy repudiating the sexual exploitation of children and that it reports annually on its activities to The Code Secretariat.

I am proud to say that our Chairman and then CEO of Carlson, Marilyn Carlson Nelson, made the decision that Carlson would be the first global, North American travel company to sign The Code. But not before we had some spirited internal debate about the pros and cons of such an action. Our legal department was concerned about possible liability and our public relations department was worried that consumers might associate our brands with child trafficking - even if we were doing something to fight it. In the end, we have had nothing but positive reaction to our signing by all stakeholders groups.

The brief video I’d like to share with you now is one element in Carlson’s module on human trafficking that’s included in what we call our “Responsible Business” training which every hotel employee goes through. In this, you’ll see a few scenarios designed to help our employees know what kind of behavior to watch for as it pertains to a possible child trafficking situation.

(RUN “HOTEL SCENARIO” VIDEO)

While Carlson was the first global hotel company in North America to sign the Code, we would have gladly given up our leadership position to have others join us. As a matter of fact, we have offered to share our training materials with any of our hotel competitors. We have always felt that there are many ways in which we can compete against each other...but on this issue, we must join hands.

Yet for 7 years, we remained the only hotel company to sign ...until just a few months ago when a significant milestone was reached: The world's largest airline, Delta, and the global hotel chain, Hilton, both signed the Code of Conduct to protect children from sexual exploitation. And we salute our industry colleagues for doing so.

To be fair, we know that while the majority of hotels have not signed, a few are doing some things to prevent the problem, but we feel that signing The Code provides all of us with a consistent template for implementation of these programs, a way to share best practices, a third-party monitoring tool to ensure that we are all doing our part and a very public shared commitment.

We look forward to the day when engagement by the travel industry in anti-trafficking activities is not considered to be a "corporate social responsibility initiative" but rather a normal business practice. In fact, the goal should be that one day we will have "normalized" corporate efforts to combat human trafficking to such a degree that they are embedded in every industry.

At Carlson, we believe that business can be one of the most powerful forces for good on the planet. We see examples of that in the Body Shop, in LexisNexis, in Manpower, Ford, Microsoft, Delta Airlines, Chiquita and dozens of other companies that are using their resources, their problem solving skills and their voices to engage in this issue. They are examining their own practices, training their employees and educating their customers and shareholders.

But with any complex problem – no one sector can solve it alone. Business, government, civil society and academia must partner more closely. We must understand each other's unique roles and leverage them. There are pieces of this problem that each of us must be accountable for in collaboration with each other to solve.

Conferences on the issue of human trafficking abound. They are enlightening and build networks to be sure. NGO Coalitions are ever-forming. Trade organizations - such as the International Travel Partnership – are exploring this issue and select businesses are self-organizing to mount their own efforts such as The Business Coalition Against Human Trafficking.

Perhaps the time is right for a formalized convening of a cross sector federal advisory board over a sustained period of time that is focused specifically on Human Trafficking. The hope would be that this initiative would accelerate progress through partnerships and capitalize on the increasing desire of the business community to make its contribution to this fight.

On behalf of Carlson, I thank the subcommittee for the work you are doing and for the privilege to support your efforts.