

As prepared

**Remarks of Attorney General Loretta Lynch
Visit to NGO Safe House
Tuesday, June 2, 2015
Riga, Latvia**

Good morning, and thank you for an especially warm welcome. It is a pleasure to be in Latvia, and a special privilege to join you today in the beautiful city of Riga. I'd like to thank the Latvian government for their hospitality – and particularly Minister of Justice Dzintars Rasnačs for accompanying us on our visit this afternoon.

I'd also like to thank all of the impressive staff here at Safe House and recognize their outstanding commitment to public service. It is an honor to see this remarkable facility, to witness the all-too-necessary work being done here, and to take inspiration from the hardworking men and women who are committed, each and every day, to improving the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in the world. The individuals here are standing up for those who cannot stand up for themselves; helping to reduce the toll that human trafficking inflicts on citizens both in Latvia and abroad; and restoring the promise of a bright future that everyone deserves.

The governments of both the United States and Latvia share a deep commitment to this work. Promoting international anti-trafficking efforts is one of my top priorities as Attorney General, and the United States Department of Justice is pursuing a comprehensive approach to the issue. We are collaborating with the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Labor to create anti-trafficking coordination teams, which have significantly increased the number and quality of human trafficking investigations and prosecutions in the cities where we've deployed them. The FBI also oversees dozens of federal, state, and local task forces and working groups that have led to hundreds of arrests and thousands of rescued trafficking survivors. And alongside aggressive criminal enforcement, we recognize that we must foster an environment in which victims are willing to speak without fear of reprisal, stigma, or punishment.

We do that in part by educating the community about the problem and by supporting the organizations and people trying to make a difference. I have personally seen how government and civil relief organizations can work together to stem the scourge of human trafficking. The Safe House where we gather today and Latvia's interagency anti-trafficking working group are some of the shining examples of that approach. It is heartening to see the significant assistance that Latvia provides to trafficking victims through state-funded rehabilitation programs, and I am especially pleased that the Latvian government has nearly doubled the funding for such programs in just the last two years. Dedicated efforts by the government and civil society organizations are helping victims, both male and female, to recover and break free from the trauma of sexual abuse, labor exploitation, coerced marriages, and emotional and physical violence that could have permanently diverted their paths in life. Through innovative programs like the Safe House, victims are reclaiming their futures and forging promising paths forward.

Latvia's efforts to support trafficking victims are vitally important, and they are significantly strengthened as a result of the tireless work of someone I would like to personally

recognize – and to thank – today. As many of you know, Gita Miruškina is a lawyer here at the Safe House with a record that speaks volumes about her unwavering dedication, her uncommon depths of compassion and sympathy, and her well-known talents for constructively assisting those who need her help the most. Over the past six years, Gita has helped more than 150 trafficking victims and represented them in nearly 30 cases. She has worked persistently to hone and expand her victim-centered approach, to lobby for heightened protection for trafficking victims and stronger penalties for traffickers, and to raise awareness among government officials and the public about emerging trafficking threats in Latvia and around the world.

That's why the United States Department of State has chosen Gita to be formally named as one of its anti-trafficking heroes – an extraordinary and well-deserved honor that Secretary of State [John] Kerry will personally bestow in Washington, DC, later this summer. Gita is the first Latvian to be named an anti-trafficking hero, and I know I speak for President Obama and our entire Administration when I tell you how proud we are of you and how inspired we are by all that you have accomplished.

The United States is proud not only to recognize Gita's achievements, but also to support the broader Latvian efforts to combat human trafficking that she exemplifies. We extend that support in a variety of ways, including trainings for law enforcement officials investigating trafficking and grants for public-awareness campaigns – like the educational trailer you see here in the courtyard. And we are ready and willing to do more. Prevention and rehabilitation efforts are essential, but exercising the rule of law through prosecutions and convictions is a necessary complement. Achieving the full measure of justice for trafficking victims means rigorously investigating and diligently prosecuting those who have inflicted their trauma. The United States is prepared to assist any country, including Latvia, in reviewing its legal procedures for trafficking cases, in expediting prosecutions, and in securing convictions fairly, properly, and efficiently.

I know that the work ahead will not be easy. But when we stand together, work together, and strive together – as people of principle, as leaders of conviction, and as nations of high ideals – no challenge or setback can deter our efforts in service of this worthy cause. I thank you all, once again, for your leadership, your collaboration, and your friendship. And I look forward to all that the United States and the Republic of Latvia will continue to achieve together in the months and years to come.

Thank you.