**CEDAW 72nd Session**

**Half-day General Discussion on Trafficking in Women and Girls**

**in the Context of Global Migration**

**22 February 2019**

*As Delivered by Margaret Grieve*

Dear Members of the Committee

On behalf of The Advocates for Human Rights, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion about trafficking in the context of migration. The Advocates is the primary provider of legal services to low-income asylum seekers in the Upper Midwest region of the United States. A growing number of women and girls fleeing violence in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala have requested legal assistance from The Advocates in applying for asylum in the United States. The Advocates also recently began providing legal services to youth who have been victims of labor trafficking. From our direct legal representation of clients from the Northern Triangle and other countries, we have determined three things related to human trafficking in the context of global migration: (1) children in particular are at risk of sex trafficking, even when traveling in the company of adults; and (2) even after arrival in the United States, individuals are at risk of labor trafficking.

1. **Children in particular are at risk of sex trafficking, even when traveling in the company of adults.**

Many of our clients who have experienced trafficking are children. Even where they are accompanied by an adult member of their family, those children are vulnerable to sex trafficking. For example, one young client entered the United States through Mexico with her mother. She reported that, as they prepared to cross the border, they were held at a smuggler’s home where photographs were taken that made the child believe she was being prepared to be sex trafficked.

Another client entered the U.S. as a 15-year-old girl with her father. A friend of the family coerced her into leaving her father’s home with him. They traveled to live several states away where the family friend groomed her to be sex-trafficked over the course of a year.

1. **Even after arrival in the United States, individuals are at risk of labor trafficking.**

Children and adults alike are vulnerable to labor trafficking after crossing into the United States. For example, one client hired a smuggler to help her travel to the United States with her young son. The smuggler posted their bond and took them across the country where they were held in a house against their will. Our client found other women and children being held at the house. Our client and the other women were forced to work in construction while her young son and other children were held in the house, unable to leave.

Another client entered the United States without inspection with her boyfriend. He brought her to live with his family and treated her well at first, but before long, he demanded that she pay him back $10,000 that he had to pay the smugglers to bring her into the country. He sexually assaulted her frequently, often several times a day. She got a cleaning and paid the family $200-300 every week to cover her “debt.” Her boyfriend’s father told her, “no one is going to believe you, you don’t have a voice, here you are nobody.” One day, her boyfriend took a knife and threatened to kill himself if she tried to leave and then began choking her. Maria escaped and called the police, but by the time they came, the family had left.

**Recommendation: The best response to trafficking is a victim-centered approach that provides survivors with legal protections and adequate support services.**

Many existing international and U.S. federal laws take a criminal-centered approach to trafficking focused on legal actions against traffickers. However, to help women and girls who have survived trafficking heal, and ultimately integrate into society and live a life free of exploitation, a victim-centered response that provides survivors with legal protections and adequate support services is critical.

Support services must meet survivors’ immediate and emergency needs for housing, medical care, mental health services, food, and connection with family as well as ongoing needs for housing, medical and mental health services, and financial support. Finally, after more immediate needs are met, survivors may also need legal advocacy services including in the areas of employment, immigration, housing, discrimination, and assistance to pursue legal remedies.

The Advocates for Human Rights encourages the Committee to consider the experience of our women and girl clients, as well as the recommendation for a victim-centered approach to identification and response to meet the needs of trafficked women and girls in the context of global migration.