



368 Arrested, 131 Victims Rescued in Sex Trafficking Operation in California

Description

USA: Authorities arrested 368 people and rescued 131 victims involved in human trafficking in a weeklong statewide multi-agency task force, announced Feb. 1.

“We know that the sex trade is a prolific one that exists throughout this state and throughout our nation,” said Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Chief Michel Moore . “It’s an ugly scar against this great country that exists too oftentimes in plain sight.”

Operation Reclaim and Rebuild was conducted between Jan. 22 and Jan. 28 in nine counties, including Los Angeles, Orange, and San Bernardino, Moore said at a news conference at the department’s Elysian Park Academy.

Numerous federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies were involved in the effort, including the LAPD, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, and the Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office.

The victims’ ages ranged from 13 to 52, including six children, and the average age was the mid-20s, Moore said.

Investigators worked with victim advocacy groups in providing services and resources “to help [victims] escape from this life-threatening environment,” he said.

Investigators responded to various advertisements offering sexual services and went to massage parlors suspected of being involved in trafficking. Among the arrestees were pimps and panderers, along with customers of such services, Moore said.

The victims are being exploited by “threat of death” or coercion, or threats against their family,” while some are kidnapped and isolated from their former support to become dependent on the trafficker, according to Moore.

Moore noted that “in the old days,” the victims of human traffickers were often regarded by law enforcement as criminals, but a more modern attitude is to regard them as having been exploited by criminals—many of them having been kidnapped and held against their will.

Authorities stressed that the seven-day task force is only a part of law enforcement agencies’ everyday effort to combat sex trafficking.

Victims are sometimes brought in from other states or countries, said David Cox, COO for ZOE International, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit that helps victims recover once rescued locally and internationally.

Read the full story [here](#).

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