

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Recognizing, Investigating And Prosecuting Human Trafficking: The Blue Campaign Comes To USVI

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United States Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Special Agent in Charge, Ivan J. Arvelo, announced on Thursday the upcoming Blue Campaign for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Blue Campaign will focus on raising public awareness about human trafficking and will offer valuable training and information for law enforcement and the public, according to the officials.

Human trafficking is a serious crime that frequently goes undetected and unreported, said the release. To address this issue, the United States Attorney's Office (USAO) and the Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations are partnering to bring DHS's highly successful Blue Campaign to the U.S. Virgin Islands with awareness events Sept. 7 and 8 in St. Croix and St. Thomas, respectively, followed by a Human Trafficking Prevention Roundtable in St. Thomas Sept. 13.

These events are open to the public and community participation is encouraged. Information about the awareness events and the roundtable are attached. Trainings for federal and territorial law enforcement will be conducted Sept. 6 in St. Croix and Sept. 10 in St. Thomas.

"Human trafficking is an especially pernicious and serious crime, because the perpetrators of human trafficking prey upon some of the most vulnerable members of our society," said U.S. Attorney Shappert. "We are deeply grateful to our DHS partners for putting the spotlight on this issue and for providing valuable resources that will enable us to address human trafficking in the territory."

"HSI as an agency is first and foremost about the people it is here to protect and serve, therefore identifying and assisting victims is paramount. As a result, HSI employs a victim-centered approach, where equal value is placed on the identification and stabilization of victims, as well as the investigation and prosecution of traffickers," Mr. Arvelo said. "Human trafficking is the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world today and occurs when a person is recruited, harbored, obtained or exported through force, fraud or coercion for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labor, involuntary servitude, debt bondage and other methods of slavery."

The Blue Campaign is the DHS initiative designed to combat human trafficking. Working in collaboration with law enforcement, government, non-governmental and private organizations, the Blue Campaign strives to protect the basic right of freedom and to bring those who exploit trafficking victims to justice. Through the Blue Campaign, DHS raises public awareness about human trafficking, leveraging partnerships to educate the public to recognize human trafficking and report suspicious activity. The Blue Campaign also offers training to law enforcement and community members in order to increase detection and prevention of human trafficking, protect victims and to prosecute the traffickers.

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