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ROBERT F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS

December 19, 2008

The Honorable Charlie Crist
Governor of the State of Florida
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor Crist,

The Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights (RFK Center) was alarmed by comments made by a member of your administration, Mr. Terence McElroy, a spokesperson for the State of Florida's Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to the *Fort Myers News-Press* downplaying the significance of modern day slavery in Florida ("Specter of slavery persists in fields," 12/14/08). The statement reflects a disturbing disregard for the rights of victims of such abusive and inhumane practices. That federal agents are still finding slavery-rings to prosecute in Florida, over one hundred forty years since the 13th Amendment banned the practice, represents a failure to protect these victims' most fundamental liberties for both the State of Florida and its agricultural industry.

Mr. McElroy made his statement one week before the sentencing of the perpetrators of what Chief Assistant US Attorney Doug Molloy called one of the "ugliest slavery cases ever." I hope that you will acknowledge the seriousness of the matter and publicly denounce Mr. McElroy's statement. I hope we can also count on your office to begin to take steps to confront these issues—

- Publicly taking a stand against slavery and human rights abuses in Florida's agricultural fields, for example, in response to the upcoming sentencing;
- Working with farmworker organizations, including the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) to discuss solutions to these abuses; and
- Encouraging the Florida Tomato Grower's Exchange (FTGE) to cooperate with purchasers and consumers on industry efforts to ensure the most basic of human rights for residents of the state of Florida.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) is a leader in anti-slavery initiatives, winning accolades from the U.S. Department of Justice and numerous local, national and international human rights organizations, including the 2003 RFK Human Rights Award. Opening a dialogue with the CIW would be a significant first step.

I hope you will also take time to examine the FTGE's efforts to obstruct agreements between farmworkers and major purchasers of Florida tomatoes, including McDonald's, Taco Bell, Burger King and Subway. These socially responsible corporations have agreed to take steps necessary to work with farmworkers and confront slavery, presenting the Florida agricultural industry an opportunity to confront the root cause of these systemic abuses. These agreements require the restaurants to pay one penny more per pound of tomatoes picked and to implement codes of conduct, developed with the workers, to ensure a more dignified existence. Hopefully your administration will work actively to convince growers to work with their consumers and farmworkers to implement these and subsequent human rights-based agreements.

Since its inception in 1968, the RFK Center (formerly the RFK Memorial) has carried on Robert Kennedy's work by promoting the full spectrum of human rights within the United States and throughout the world. We thank you for your attention to this matter and hope you will not hesitate to contact me (at 202-463-7575 ext 225 or lynnd@rfkmemorial.org) or my colleague, Sushetha Gopallawa, Advocacy Director (at 202-463-7575 ext 270 or gopallawa@rfkmemorial.org).

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynn Delaney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Lynn" on top and "Delaney" below it.

Lynn Delaney
Executive Director
Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights