

## **Gonzales says U.S. must also look to the North.**

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Nov. 15--While there's much focus on protecting the nation's southern border, U.S. Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales came to Buffalo on Tuesday to inspect the area's international bridges and put an exclamation point on previously announced plans to combat human trafficking.

"We're also concerned about the protection of our northern border," Gonzales told reporters, adding that the number of federal agents and inspectors at the northern border has more than doubled since 2001.

"To focus solely on the southern border and not on our northern border would be at our peril," Gonzales said during the tightly scripted 19-minute news conference. Gonzales, after a helicopter tour of the area's international bridges, officially announced nearly \$900,000 in federal funding to combat human trafficking here. The funding, first announced last month, will provide \$450,000 for law enforcement agencies and \$449,708 to the International Institute for victims' services.

Using the term "modern-day slavery," Gonzales cited the shutdown of a forced labor operation involving Mexican field workers at pumpkin farms in Albion. "They were living and working in deplorable conditions," U.S. Attorney Terrance P. Flynn said. "They had lost all their liberties."

That case, Gonzales said, showed that the area's large ethnic population and many farming communities employing migrant workers make Western New York attractive to human traffickers. "Now we know that we must work together to fight human trafficking, and we must intensify our efforts to do so," the attorney general said. "Because right now, the victims of these criminals are out there, they are suffering, and they are waiting for our help." The funding will be used to establish a new Human Trafficking Task Force here, one that will include two service agencies, the International Institute and Farmworkers' Legal Services; and two law enforcement agencies, the Erie County Sheriff's Office and the U.S. attorney's office. The human-service agencies will provide essential services for the victims, while the law enforcement agencies work together to identify the illegal operations and prosecute the people running them. Among other points, Gonzales said: He would welcome a chance to sit down with new congressional leaders to discuss the need for preserving the tools the federal government needs to fight terrorists and other criminals. Gonzales stressed that those tools are effective and are being used in a responsible manner.

"These are tools that are absolutely necessary," he said. He had spent very little time in this part of the country. Asked what he had observed on his helicopter tour of area bridges, the attorney general said, "My initial reaction was that it's a beautiful part of the country." e-mail: [gwarner@buffnews.com](mailto:gwarner@buffnews.com)

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