

HOT LIST

PRO BONO

A SPECIAL REPORT

LATHAM & WATKINS

An economic solution to human trafficking

Attorney General Eric Holder Jr. in April 2012 called the fate of the estimated tens of millions of human-trafficking victims around the globe “alarming and almost unfathomable.” Without question, Holder said during a speech in Arkansas, “this problem has reached crisis proportions.”

The fight against human trafficking is a main focus of Latham & Watkins’ pro bono program. The firm has represented trafficking victims and helped to bring criminals to justice. One project, in particular, was one of Latham’s most challenging yet—helping the anti-slavery advocacy organization Not For Sale set up what the law firm called a “unique and innovative social enterprise.”

A team of Latham attorneys, including corporate partners Raymond Lin and Joshua Tinkelman in New York, finance partner William Voge in London and intellectual property partner Steven Betensky in New York, helped structure a for-profit iced tea company designed to create stable business and social structures in a region of the Peruvian Amazon plagued by human trafficking and forced labor.

The product, REBBL Inc. (for “Roots,

Extracts, Berries, Bark and Leaves”), was introduced during fall 2012. The company says its mission “is to end slavery, not to simply put a bandage on the wound that it creates.” The beverage line, Latham lawyers said, will generate money for investments in education and health infrastructure that sponsors hope will make residents less susceptible to trafficking.

Latham’s pro bono team helped structure the tea company, which will use roots and plants from the Amazon, including intellectual property licensing and setting up an initial round of seed financing from social entrepreneurs. Lin, a transactional lawyer, said he was “overwhelmed by the number of associates” who wanted to work on the project.

The project “allowed us to use our expertise in what we know how to do, put together a company, figure out how to structure a deal,” Lin said. It also was a great learning experience for Latham associates.

“The cause of Not For Sale has just blossomed,” said Voge, describing the group’s 20 employees as “going 90 miles an hour” toward their goal. Human trafficking “is such a huge concern that’s been under the radar for



so long. It’s the ugliest, most despicable crime in the world today.”

And what’s the early word on the iced tea itself? Voge and Lin said they’re fans. “I’ve got a case of it here in my office,” Lin said.

—MIKE SCARCELLA