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**UNITAS NORTH AMERICA ANNOUNCES TONYA TURNER TO SERVE  
AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**First Black Woman to Lead a US-Based International Counter-Trafficking  
Organization Expands Prevention Initiative With the NYC Department of Education**

**NEW YORK, June 7, 2021** — [UNITAS North America](#), an international organization that combats human trafficking, has announced that Tonya Turner will serve as its Executive Director. Turner will become the first Black woman to lead a U.S.-based international counter-trafficking organization. A fierce advocate and educator, her primary focus at UNITAS North America will be to expand training and prevention education programs which confront risk factors that predispose American youth to trafficking and exploitation including poverty, neglect, and abuse.

With Black women and girls representing more than 40 percent of people who are exploited annually in the U.S., Turner's historic post to the leadership role reflects the urgency to provide educational and awareness solutions to eradicate a growing problem.

"Many people mistakenly believe that human trafficking is primarily a problem in other countries, but it is also shockingly prevalent here in the U.S." said Turner. "Truancy, homelessness, and histories of sexual abuse are just a few of the fault lines in our country's systems that set the stage for a future at-risk. Through our prevention efforts and training, UNITAS is changing the narrative about trafficking where our youth and those who care for them are unlearning what they've previously learned about trauma, as well as what's previously been normalized in relation to it."

Turner joined UNITAS in 2018 serving as the organization's Education and Training Director. Her work with survivors led to the creation of [LIGHTS](#), a cutting-edge prevention education curriculum that speaks to youth through the lens of the survivors' experiences, and empowers individuals between the ages of 11 to 18 with knowledge and skills to protect themselves from human trafficking and exploitation.

(more)

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Turner spearheaded the organization's partnership with the New York City Department of Education, the largest school district in the United States, with more than 1 million students. Turner has trained 1,000 NYC Department of Education social workers and counselors as well as more than 200 personnel in Washington, D.C. schools to-date. UNITAS has also partnered with the NYC Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV) and looks forward to bringing the LIGHTS curricula to more young New Yorkers through ENDGBV's NYC Healthy Relationship Training and the city's Relationship Abuse Prevention Programs (RAPP).

With a certification in Teaching and Learning from Harvard University, Turner frequently gives keynote speeches on the risks and causes of human trafficking, and has trained thousands of social workers, counselors, and therapists, among other groups, throughout the United States. Prior to joining UNITAS, Turner was Director of Training and Technical Assistance for GEMS (Girls Educational and Mentoring Services), which serves victims of commercial sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking. She previously had extensive experience working within Fortune 500 companies, creating and delivering solutions designed for large scale growth. Turner has a corporate background in SaaS technology and her client portfolio included Goldman Sachs, and Pfizer, among other companies.

Turner succeeds former UNITAS North America Executive Director Todd Cavaluzzi, who will now serve as Senior Advisor: "As the UNITAS mission takes on a greater urgency and significance globally, we're pleased and heartened to expand on the approach of confronting and preventing trafficking more directly through elevated training and education. Tonya has also done a great deal to further survivor involvement in our programs, and is committed to helping survivors overcome trauma, move forward with their lives, and thrive."

Research has found that an estimated 400,000 people in the U.S. are currently subject to the trauma and abuse associated with the trafficking industry—which includes labor and sex-trafficking, as well as debt bondage and forced marriage. More than 70 percent of these people are victims of sex trafficking, with an average age of 15.

### **About UNITAS:**

UNITAS ([www.UNITAS.ngo](http://www.UNITAS.ngo)) is an international non-profit organization dedicated to preventing human trafficking and exploitation in the US and in Eastern Europe through education and awareness and providing opportunities for survivors to thrive. Since 2015, UNITAS has forged partnerships with governments, NGOs, executives, and other experts in the field to develop collaborative solutions in the fight against human trafficking. UNITAS has empowered tens of thousands of children all over the world with the necessary knowledge and skills to identify and avoid the schemes of human traffickers. UNITAS has offices in Belgrade, Serbia and New York, USA, where the organization is developing innovative programs to expand regionally. Watch the UNITAS Mission Video [here](#), and for further information visit <http://www.unitas.ngo>.

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