DNA Helps Reunite Children With Their Families

FORT WORTH, Texas, Aug. 4 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Of the 600,000-800,000 people trafficked across international borders each year, 50 percent are under 17. It is estimated that by 2010, human trafficking will be the No. 1 crime worldwide.

Arthur Eisenberg, Ph.D., professor and chairman of the department of forensic and investigative Genetics and co-director of the UNT **Center for Human Identification** at the **University of North Texas (UNT) Health Science Center**, is on a mission to stop this horrific industry through a $500,000 grant from **The Life Technologies Foundation** to develop the **DNA-PROKIDS Project** (Program for Kids Identification with DNA Systems). PROKIDS is an international humanitarian effort using DNA testing to deter human trafficking of children and help reunite abducted and homeless children with their parents.

Through the DNA-PROKIDS program, DNA samples will be obtained from children associated with human trafficking whether through prostitution, forced labor, militant activities, or illegal adoptions, or homeless children found living on the street. Their DNA profiles will be stored in an international database were they can be searched against the DNA profiles provided by families who have had their children kidnapped or lost.

Eisenberg is collaborating with Jose Lorente, M.D., Ph.D., associate professor of legal and forensic medicine at the University of Granada-Spain, to help establish a worldwide DNA database to help reunite children with their parents and ultimately deter the trafficking of children. Lorente was inspired to establish DNA-PROKIDS to help return children to their parents after seeing countless numbers of children wandering the streets in cities across the world. He wondered, were their families looking for them? Without a way to identify them, it would be impossible to bring them home. Perhaps an international DNA database would help reunite these children with their families.

Lorente chose to collaborate with the UNT Health Science Center because of its reputation as a world-renowned center for human identification. The Center has been responsible for the development of DNA technologies and systems for parentage testing, forensic testing and for the identification of missing persons and human remains.

Eisenberg and Lorente hope all countries throughout the world will develop national databases that will link to an international repository of these DNA profiles. Then DNA- PROKIDS will become a deterrent and prevent criminals from kidnapping and trafficking children, the most vulnerable of all victims.

About the University of North Texas Health Science Center

The University of North Texas Health Science Center comprises the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine, the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, the School of Public Health, and the School of Health Professions. Key research areas include aging and Alzheimer's disease, cancer and physical medicine. This year, the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine was named a top 50 medical school in primary care by *U.S. News & World Report* for the eighth consecutive year. "Fort Worth's medical school and more" contributes more than $400 million to the Tarrant County and Texas economies annually. For more information, go to **http://www.hsc.unt.edu/**

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