As a Carlson board member, Vice President of the Carlson Family Foundation and Carlson family member, I am honored to present the following statement regarding Carlson’s efforts to combat the sexual exploitation of children in the travel and tourism industry to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women 60 – 2016.

Carlson is keenly aware that child trafficking is a complex, worldwide problem, the pieces of which the public, private, NGO sectors, civil society and academia must be accountable for and collaborative with one another to resolve. In an effort to leverage our unique capabilities and responsibilities as a global corporate citizen, Carlson has sought opportunities for more than 15 years to protect children through various platforms and partnerships. The first such opportunity came to our attention in 1999 with an invitation from Her Royal Majesty Queen Silvia of Sweden who requested that Carlson become a co-founder of the World Childhood Foundation which supports projects around the world to prevent the abuse and exploitation of children, including trafficking.

In 2004, Carlson made the decision to take a public stance on the specific issue of child sex trafficking in the travel and tourism industry when my mother and former Carlson CEO, Marilyn Carlson Nelson, signed The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism (The Code). At the time, the discussion of this dark issue was almost taboo in the industry. Given our prior engagement in children’s issues, the U.S. State Department approached Carlson to take a leadership position. We learned that the travel industry can be at times an unwitting accomplice in this crime against children which often plays out in hotel rooms. Once this grim situation was brought to our attention, we could not turn away. Carlson made the decision to become the first global, North American travel and hospitality company to sign The Code which asks that corporations train their employees on what to watch for and how to report suspicious activity. In effect, Carlson’s hotel employees worldwide became a virtual army of eyes and ears in defensive of exploited children. We then went on to use every opportunity to encourage our travel industry colleagues to join us in this fight. Since Carlson’s signing, Delta Airlines, Sabre Holdings, Orbitz Worldwide and several major hospitality companies have signed The Code.

In 2010, Carlson became a signatory to the UN Global Compact, thereby furthering its commitment to human rights across all business units. And, in 2011, Carlson Wagonlit Travel, one of the world’s largest travel management companies, began issuing advisories on electronic tickets issued in the U.S. to destinations where there is a prevalence of child sex tourism. We asked our customers to join us in reporting suspicious activity to the National Human Trafficking hotline, an organization which our Family Foundation proudly supports. Many of our executives and senior management have also served on NGO and industry boards that are combating this issue at both the global and local level.

ECPAT USA (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes) has suggested that The Code’s mission can be advanced within the industry if more hotel companies communicate their commitment and require training on this issue at the franchisee level. Carlson remains committed to encouraging others in the travel industry to incorporate this issue into their ethics policies, employee training and supplier contracts in the hopes that one day protecting the world’s children will no longer be considered a “responsible business” initiative but rather a standard business practice.