July Newsletter
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2015 Trafficking in Persons Report

The U.S. State Department annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report was released this week, rating 188 countries on their efforts to combat human trafficking. This year’s report has a special emphasis on trafficking in persons in the global marketplace, highlighting the underlying risks that individuals may face when seeking employment and the ways in which governments and businesses can take to combat trafficking, including a demand for transparency in supply chains.

The Report aims to “enlighten, energize and empower” activists fighting the human trafficking industry across every continent. It ranks countries that do the most to fight human trafficking in Tier 1, and the least in Tier 3. Tier 2 includes a Watch List for countries in danger of dropping to Tier 3. This year, 18 countries were upgraded and another 18 were downgraded. The rankings of the 6 GMS countries remained unchanged in the 2015 report; with a short introduction below.

CAMBODIA: A new national action plan was adopted by the government of Cambodia to combat human trafficking but there has been a lack of support services available for male victims and draft guidance for victim identification have not been finalised. Complicity of officials in trafficking has also not been addressed, despite widespread recognition that this has contributed to the problem. The failure to demonstrate the overall increasing anti-trafficking efforts compared to the previous reporting period, has placed Cambodia on Tier 2 Watch List for the third consecutive year.
CHINA: The Ministry of Public Security indicates 194 arrests and at least 35 convictions made in human trafficking cases. Some progress in ending ‘re-education through labour’ has been made, however there are concerns that the practice remains under different forms. There is a need to refine legislation to comply with the UN TIP Protocol and provide support services to victims of trafficking. China is placed on Tier 2 Watch List for the second consecutive year.

LAOS: The government of Laos continued to make prosecutions and convictions in trafficking cases and to provide short-term assistance to some victims. This has been almost entirely dependent on local and international organisations and there has been no notable progress to proactively identify trafficking victims, strengthen the quality of services available for victims or to increase access to services for the male victims of trafficking. It was deemed that few efforts have been demonstrated in increasing overall anti-trafficking efforts compared to the previous reporting period, and consequently Laos remains on Tier 2 Watch List for the second consecutive year.

MYANMAR: The government has continued to implement prevention measures under the National Plan of Action, demobilising child soldiers and implementing related awareness-raising campaigns. However, there is considerable involvement of officials in forced labour, domestically as well as trafficking across borders which have not been sufficiently investigated. Myanmar remains on the Tier 2 Watch List for a fourth consecutive year.

THAILAND: The Government of Thailand has increased prevention measures, passed amendments to its 2008 trafficking law to increase penalties for traffickers and to protect whistleblowers, and improved its data collection methods. However, Thai officials complicit in trafficking continues to significantly undermine anti-trafficking efforts and are insufficiently prosecuted. The prosecution of journalists and advocates for exposing traffickers and insufficient victim identification mechanisms also impede progress in combating trafficking in persons. Without significant efforts to address these underlying problems, Thailand remains on Tier 3 for a second consecutive year.

VIETNAM: Vietnamese authorities continued the conviction and prosecution of internal and transnational sex traffickers but failed to pursue criminal prosecution for labour traffickers. The government reported that an increased number of officials received anti-trafficking training; however, many officials were unable to identify and investigate labour trafficking cases, resulting in a failure to identify victims and to pursue criminal investigations. Vietnam is placed on Tier 2 for the fourth consecutive year.

TRAFFICKING TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS

CAMBODIA

- According to the Ministry of Labour in Thailand, only 98,000 out of almost 520,000 registered Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand have the necessary documentation; 107,000 possess visas until March 2016; and 314,000 have no passports and are yet to be verified.
- 230 Cambodian human trafficking victims from the fishing industry have returned home from Ambon Island, Indonesia.
- 3 Chinese were nationals imprisoned for 7 years for an attempt to traffic 4 Cambodian teenage girls to China; 2 Cambodian women imprisoned—one for 10 years and another for 2 years for trafficking 5 women into sex work in Malaysia.
**CHINA**

- A social media campaign has gone viral calling for the death penalty to be imposed on those found guilty of child trafficking resulting from the frequent and significant reports of the practice. Legal experts have defended the existing penalties as being sufficient and have suggested that more serious punishments for buyers may be useful.

- A law on the management of foreign NGOs has been drafted and is currently under consultation. International NGOs working to combat trafficking in China are awaiting to see how the development affects their ability to continue working in this regard.

- The Ministry of Civil Affairs is exploring evaluation of the Adoption Law implementation to improve monitoring of the adoption system and to prevent trafficking of children for this purpose.

**LAO PDR**

- The Government and NGO partners have been involved in workplanning around the Fourth COMMIT Sub-Regional Plan of Action for the remainder of 2015.

- 8 Lao victims who were trafficked onto fishing boats have been returned to their homes in Champasack, Savannakhet and Vientiane, following action on the fisheries industry in Indonesia.

- The Government has agreed to establish a database collating information on trafficking cases with support from the AAPTIP project. Planning consultations will take place in the coming months.

- The government has been reviewing the Lao - Thai MOU on cooperation to combat trafficking in persons ahead of upcoming bilateral discussions.

**MYANMAR**

- The COMMIT Taskforce met to review implementation of the National Plan of Action and plan for coming activities. This was conducted together with CSO and youth representatives for the first time.

- International cooperation in law enforcement was the focus of a bilateral meeting between Myanmar and Thai anti-trafficking police at an operational level, and in another meeting together with Indonesia focusing on the fishing industry, with the support of AAPTIP.

- World Vision organised the “Survivor Gathering Workshop” in Yangon with government partners, to share experiences, empower survivors and identify gaps in TIP responses. 27 trafficking survivors from different areas of Myanmar participated.

- 132 Myanmar males were repatriated in June after the clampdown on illegal fishing Indonesia, most of who had been in forced labour on fishing boats.

**THAILAND**

- Human trafficking in the fishing industry remains a high priority for anti-trafficking partners, receiving significant media focus, and national and international attention. The Freedom Fund has announced its
support to NGOs in Thailand as part of its strategy to target hotspots in the fights against modern slavery.

- 236 witnesses in pending trafficking cases were granted police protection after receiving threats and intimidation by traffickers. 119 arrest warrants issued; 56 arrested 21 suspects still on the run.
- Thai Chamber of Commerce and 6 representatives from Fishing Associations and CP Foods are collaborating with the government to combat human trafficking and IUU fishing. The private sector group have agreed to terminate contracts with suppliers found violating human rights or the Fisheries Act, 2015.
- Registration of migrant workers from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia has been opened over the period 30 June to 30 July. Legal action will be taken against employers who fail to register their employees after this period.

VIET NAM

- Representatives from Vietnam, Cambodia and Lao PDR confirmed their commitment to enhancing counter-human trafficking, strengthening information exchange, establish hotlines and assigning liaison officers. The three countries also discussed further coordination in criminal investigations to combat TIP, the repatriation of victims, and agreed to launch a 3-month crackdown on human trafficking along the Vietnamese border.
- In the first half of 2015, 136 human trafficking cases have been solved by the Vietnamese police; resulting in the arrest of 227 traffickers and rescue of 303 victims.

IN THE NEWS

A Bangladeshi town in human trafficking’s grip
Fishermen, shopkeepers and police were drawn into a multi-million dollar people smuggling business, either as participants or observers. An investigative report from The New York Times looks at the trade in people from the coast of Bangladesh, as migrants and trafficked persons start a perilous journey ending for some in brutal camps and mass graves in Thailand and Malaysia.

Cooperation between Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia to combat human trafficking
Viet Nam Ministry of Public Security’s Police Department will strengthen cooperation with Laos’ Ministry of Public Security and Cambodia’s Ministry of Interior to combat against human trafficking as the number of cases has increased recently. Major General Ho Sy Tien, head of Viet Nam’s Police Department, said that as many as 110 trafficking victims in the first six months of the year were rescued near the border of Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia. The three countries hope to intensify their efforts in exchanging information, setting up hotlines to investigate criminal organizations in the border areas, as well as repatriation victims of trafficking. Viet Nam News

Thai cabinet considers new court for human trafficking
Deputy Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai stated on July 21 that the bill to set up a Criminal Court's Division on Human Trafficking has been forwarded to the Cabinet for approval as a provisional agenda. The establishment of the court would prove Thailand's strong determination and sincerity in suppressing trafficking in persons. *Asia One*

### Underage African footballers are trafficked to Laos

African footballers, some as young as 14, are reportedly being trafficked to Southeast Asia and forced to sign contracts. The 23 underage players are alleged to have been invited to the unregistered academy--IDSEA Champasak Asia African Football Academy--in Laos by former Liberia international Alex Karmo in February, 2015. They expected expert training, salary, medical care and accommodation. However, the reality was very different. They worked unpaid and slept on the floor of the club's stadium. *BBC*

### Trial of Phuketwan journalists in Thailand

The trial of journalists from Phuketwan newspaper for defamation of Thai naval officers, alleging their role in human trafficking, ended on 16 July with verdict expected by 1 September. The United Nations Human Rights Office said in a statement that it "urges the Thai authorities to drop the charges against the two journalists... Freedom of the press, including freedom for journalists to operate without fear of reprisals, is essential in promoting transparency and accountability on issues of public interest". *The Guardian*

### ASEAN to set up joint task force, fund to combat human trafficking

All 10 members of ASEAN have agreed to set up a joint task force to combat transnational crime, as well as a fund to help victims of human trafficking among member nations. Yangon insisted that the issues of the Rohingya is a domestic and political one, which should remain outside the meeting. Respecting Myanmar’s position, ASEAN ministers participating in the meeting chose to focus on strengthening regional cooperation in law enforcement. *Jakarta Post*
People smugglers imprisoned but no trafficking charges filed in Myanmar

Twenty accused human smugglers suspected of transporting Bangladeshi migrants and Rohingya refugees have been sentenced to five years in prison for violating Myanmar’s immigration law. However, none of the suspects are facing human trafficking charges, even as the boats’ owner is currently being prosecuted for such crimes in Thailand. Police Major Ye Win Lwin stated that the 20 defendants cannot be tried for human trafficking due to the strict definition of the law. Additionally, the government still insists that there have been no cases of trafficking in Rakhine State. *Myanmar Times*

Myanmar repatriates 155 rescued Bangladeshi migrants

Bangladesh has now taken back 342 trafficking victims from Myanmar. Around 2,000 Bangladeshis have been rescued in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Myanmar in the last two months after the issue of human trafficking at sea gained international media’s attention. Several thousand Bangladeshis, who had allegedly left home for jobs in Malaysia, still remain missing. *The Daily Star*

FEATURED PUBLICATIONS

Investigative journalism exposes the scale of human trafficking in the fishing industry

Media reports in recent months have detailed human trafficking and forced labour in the fisheries industry, bringing to light the shocking abuses and dire working conditions that are faced by many of those who are tricked to work on fishing boats.

The Associated Press investigated the supply chains that bring fish from boats using forced labour to supply networks of supermarkets and restaurants in the United States and asked “Are slaves catching the fish you buy?” The interviews with men held in cages on the island of Benjina, who spoke of being forced back onto fishing trawlers and staying at sea for years at a time, prompted an international response and as a result, the Thai and Myanmar governments sent delegations to rescue their nationals. A further report was released in July after a 4 month investigation following fishing trawlers believed to have trafficked men working on board, from Indonesia to Papua New Guinea.

Guardian has published a series of in-depth reports on human trafficking in the fishing industry as part of a series on modern-day slavery. Supported by Humanity United, this campaign has been detailing the supply chains, both in terms of the trafficked labour and the fish caught. The reports feature interviews with both victims and brokers, photography, and strong analysis of the endemic problems in the Thai fishing industry.

The New York Times is publishing a series called ‘The Outlaw Ocean’ looking at crime and violence on the high seas, from journalist Ian Urbina. The third in the series, “Sea Slaves”, shows the entrenched patterns of forced labour in the industry, including reports of victims being chained by the neck to prevent escape, beaten and working in inhumane conditions, for the purpose of supplying fish for pet food.
Anti-trafficking actors have made significant efforts in recent years to raise the profile of the entrenched nature of trafficking into the fisheries industry. The media spotlight now focusing on the scale and dynamics of the problem is a vital step for governments and consumers to make decisions that will help end the forced labour on fishing boats.

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