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Human trafficking and the post-2015 development agenda

This September will see the Sustainable Development Goals replace the Millennium Development Goals as the new set of goals for international development. These goals, and their targets and indicators, will be used by governments and the global community to frame their agendas and policies over the next 15 years. The inclusion of targets under 2 of the goals that expressly state the aim to end human trafficking demonstrates the global commitment in this respect, and also provides an opportunity to address root causes of human trafficking as part of a broader development aim.

Poverty
Combating poverty is at the heart of development efforts and eradicating it “in all its forms everywhere” is the first Goal of the SDGs. Poverty and income inequality are primary contributing factors in increasing the vulnerability of individuals to human trafficking. Human trafficking flows in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) are heavily influenced by imbalances in the socio-economic development of neighbouring countries, with studies confirming that extreme inequality between and within states is one of the main barriers to human development. Achieving development goals that target poverty will in turn help efforts to prevent human trafficking.

Migration
Migration has inherent risks, especially when it occurs in an irregular fashion. Goal 10 aims to reduce inequality within and among countries, with an associated target on the facilitation of “orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration”. Much of the region’s labour migration occurs through undocumented, irregular channels, and such migration patterns increase the risks of migrants being exploited in their course. The declaration recognises the “positive contribution of migrants” in growth and development and the SDGs contain targets that outline very specific
goals aimed at migrant workers, such as reforms to remittance transaction costs. Development goals improving migration opportunities will have a positive economic effect on both sending and receiving countries, while protecting and promoting the rights of those who choose to migrate.

**Climate Change and Environment**
The post-2015 development agenda, generally and under specific goals, aims to mitigate the effects of climate change and promote environmental responsibility. Climate change is increasingly impacting livelihoods and migration patterns, as are natural disasters. The region faces some of the world’s most drastic environmental challenges from natural disasters, pollution in urban areas, land degradation in the countryside, and the overharvesting of communal natural resources. The overfishing of the waters in Southeast Asia, for example, has dramatically reduced local fish stocks, forcing the fishing industry to fish waters far from any coast. Lengthier fishing voyages make it harder to find people willing to work on fishing boats, which has contributed to a rise in the number of men trafficked onto fishing vessels. Conservation and responsible use of the oceans is addressed in Goal 14, which includes as a target on ending illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Achieving this target would have a direct impact on human trafficking in the fishing industry; just one example where broader development goals crosscut counter trafficking efforts.

**Gender Inequality and Discrimination**
The SDG agenda acknowledges that sustainable development is not possible if women are not equal participants in the process, and that gender mainstreaming is crucial to the effective implementation of the SDGs. Women’s empowerment is affected by low participation in the work force, and women are disproportionately represented in the informal economy where unstable incomes and abusive work place practices are more common. The SDGs seek to “recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work” by improving public services available to women and improving social protection policies. Goal 5 contains a target aimed at eliminating violence against women, including trafficking and sexual exploitation and forced marriage. The MDGs sought to “promote” gender equality; the SDGs aim to achieve it.

**Governance and the Rule of Law**
Corruption and the weak application of the rule of law compounds and entrenches trafficking patterns. Goal 16 contains an ambitious 12 targets addressing corruption, rule of law, institution building and governance. Also included is a specific target to end trafficking in children. Human trafficking is a crime that is notoriously under-prosecuted in the GMS region and throughout the world. Prosecution and conviction rates are disconcertingly low in comparison with regional
figures of exploitation. Development efforts to support efficient, inclusive forms of democratic governance, and aspirations to strengthen national human rights institutions, are essential to help combat human trafficking.

The SDGs provide specific entry points to address and combat trafficking in persons, and UN-ACT is looking forward to working with its partners to help deliver on the commitments made. To read more about the Sustainable Development Goals, click here.

TRAFFICKING TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS

CAMBODIA
• According to Cambodia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 48 Cambodian women who were deceived into marrying Chinese men have been rescued by Cambodian authorities.
• On July 28, 33 Cambodian men who were trafficked onto fishing boats in Indonesia, returned home with the efforts of the Cambodian Embassy in Jakarta and IOM.
• A joint task force comprising officials from the Anti-Trafficking Police and the Interior Ministry arrested a broker who allegedly deceived 3 Cambodians into working on Thai fishing boats in Indonesian waters.

CHINA
• Chinese government officials held a forum in Shanghai with foreign non-governmental organizations to discuss the role of international NGOs in China and the potential for activities and greater cooperation.
• The China-Vietnam Joint Special Action against Trafficking in Persons was launched in Kunming. There have been 4 such joint special actions by China and Vietnam since 2010, which facilitate cross-border cooperation on human trafficking.

LAO PDR
• 18 Lao trafficked persons were returned to their communities by the Lao Women's Union with the joint support of IOM, World Vision Laos and Village Focus International. UN-ACT played a coordinating role between the government and development partners.
MYANMAR
• Officials working with trafficking victims across Myanmar met in Nay Pyi Taw to discuss current difficulties in their return and repatriation efforts.

THAILAND
• ASEAN Ministers have agreed to establish a joint task force to combat transnational crime and a fund to help trafficking victims.
• The Government’s recent crackdown on illegal fishing resulted in most trawler owners suspending their operations.
• In July, Department of Special Investigation arrested 2 men involved in a human trafficking ring; over 100 people have been indicted since the crackdown, including an army general and politicians for human trafficking of migrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar.

VIET NAM
• The government has commenced the initial planning of a new 5-year National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan for 2016 to 2020.
• The Viet Nam Penal Code is being revised by the government to bring key articles which relate to human trafficking closer to international standards.

IN THE NEWS
Special Report: State Department watered down human trafficking report
Reuters digs deeper into the decisions and controversy over the 2015 Trafficking in Person Report (TIP Report) tier rankings released by the U.S. State Department. Questions have been raised regarding the upgrade of Malaysia's status. Whereas Thailand has been placed on Tier 3, the worst ranking among 22 other countries. Reuters
Indonesia Navy nabs Thai cargo ship
Indonesian authorities have seized an enormous Thai-owned refrigerated cargo ship, allegedly bearing slave-caught fish. The ship was escorted to shore and an investigation into human trafficking, offloading at sea and the transport of illegal fish is being launched. A satellite image of the ship was captured by the Associated Press last month in Papua New Guinea waters and a satellite beacon was used to trace the ship's path from PNG into Indonesian waters. Bangkok Post

Debate over death penalty for child traffickers goes on
Death penalty or not? That is a question facing judges who handle child-trafficking cases in China these days. In June, calls on social media to hand down capital punishment to anyone involved in child trafficking triggered a heated debate on the appropriate punishment for such offences. News Asia One
Indian gangs found trafficking women from earthquake-hit Nepal

Police in India say they have uncovered a human trafficking network that has sent hundreds of young women from earthquake-hit areas of Nepal to the Gulf, where they were forced into manual labour and sex work. In a series of arrests 10 days ago, police at Delhi’s main airport detained two airline staff and two suspected traffickers. They also took 21 young women into their care, seven from the airport itself – where they were being led onto a flight to Dubai – and the rest from a hotel nearby. The Guardian

New arrests in Thai human trafficking probe

The Major-General Paween Pongsirin stated that 26 new arrest warrants had been issued for suspects accused of human trafficking and money laundering in Thailand of which 12 arrests have already been made. Further 16 arrest warrants have been issued solely for money laundering charges related to trafficking, of whom 10 had been detained, which has brought down the total number of warrants issued since the current crackdown began to 145. Malaysia Insider
'Slave' fishermen not all trafficking victims

The return of hundreds more Myanmar fishermen found in slave-like conditions in Indonesia is at risk. The embassy in Jakarta divided the men into 2 groups - trafficking victims and non-trafficked "slaves", said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The distinction appears contrary to 2005 Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law of Myanmar which states - anyone who has been transferred, transported or hired with the purpose of "exploitation" including forced work or slavery is considered a victim of trafficking and repatriation of identified trafficking victims is the responsibility of the government. Myanmar Times

Costco faces lawsuit over sale of prawns allegedly farmed by slave labour

Allegations have been put on Costco Wholesale Corp. by one of its customers that it is knowingly selling frozen prawns which were purchased by it from its Southeast Asian producers that came from a supply chain dependent on human trafficking and other illegal labor abuses. Costco Wholesale Corp. and CP Foods (Thai supplier of Costco Wholesale Corp.) are the defendants in the concerned case. Los Angeles Times
Police interview Lao 'slaves' over trafficking

Thirteen illegal Lao labour immigrants -- some as young as 15 years old -- were rescued from an alleged "slavery farm" in Nakhon Pathom. Saranya Sawatnok, the Chief of the Nakhon Pathom Shelter for Children and Families under the Social Development and Human Security Ministry, made a statement that these immigrants will not be charged with illegal entry into Thailand as they are believed to be the victims of human trafficking. Bangkok Post

Asia Migrant Crisis: New mass graves on Malaysia-Thai border

More mass graves with 24 bodies have been found in Malaysia, following the discovery of series of camps found in the jungle near Malaysia’s border with Thailand in May this year that made a shocking revelation of how the migrants were held in human cages made of wood and barbed wire. The discovery of newly found graves was made in the state of Perlis which is not too far from 139 grave sites which were uncovered in May this year. BBC
UN-ACT welcomes our new Regional Project Manager!

The team at UN-ACT is excited to have Kaori Kawarabayashi on board as our new Regional Project Manager. She brings over 17 years of experience on international development issues in various regions including Asia. She has worked for WFP Regional Bureau for Asia (Bangkok), UNDP South Sudan, UNDP Jordan, UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa and UNDP’s Operations Support Group (Executive Office).

In addition, she has worked for development organizations in Chile, Hungary, India, Mauritania, Mexico, Togo, and Turkey, and she has also worked in the private sector. Her experience on project management, heading the secretariat for a UN-goverment initiative, and implementing regional/inter-governmental projects will contribute to her new role managing UN-ACT. She holds an MPA and an MBA, both from Harvard University. She has also studied at Georgetown University, The London School of Economics, La Sorbonne and Oxford. She is looking forward to working with the UN-ACT team and our partners.
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