

Statement on 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report

Human trafficking is a heinous crime that knows no borders, and creates tens of millions of victims worldwide, including men, women, and children.

“Human trafficking,” “trafficking in persons,” and “modern slavery” have been used interchangeably to describe the exploitation of someone for the purposes of compelled labour or commercial sex through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. Forms of human trafficking include sex trafficking and forced labour, including debt bondage and domestic servitude. When a person younger than 18 is subjected to prostitution, it is sex trafficking even without any showing of force, fraud, or coercion.

The US Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report was released in Washington on June 30, 2016, and Thailand was upgraded to Tier 2 Watch List.

The 2016 TIP Report covers governments’ anti-trafficking efforts from April 1, 2015 through March 31, 2016. The Tier 2 Watch List ranking indicates that the Government of Thailand made significant efforts to eliminate trafficking during the rating period, but still does not fully meet the minimum standards for doing so.

The Tier 2 Watch List ranking underscores that the problem of human trafficking in Thailand remains large and requires additional, substantial, and effective government leadership. We encourage Thailand to make further, sustained progress in fighting trafficking and enforcing Thai anti-trafficking laws. The report includes a list of recommendations specific to the trafficking issues in Thailand that we believe will help the government make progress.

We encourage the government to implement those recommendations fully. US government agencies and law enforcement officials remain partners to the government and civil society in Thailand as they work to end human trafficking.

In 2015, the Thai government reported increases over the previous year in investigating sex trafficking cases and suspected cases of forced labour, as well as in prosecuting and convicting hundreds of traffickers. The government also began to investigate labour trafficking in the fishing industry in dozens of cases. Labour trafficking, including debt bondage, however, remains a significant problem in Thailand, and widespread forced labour in Thailand’s seafood sector continued to occur. Most complicit officials, employers, owners, brokers and recruitment agencies involved in trafficking continued to operate with relative impunity. The government initiated prosecutions of cases involving abused Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants.

We encourage timely active follow through on investigations, prosecutions, and court proceedings of all pending cases, including of allegedly complicit government officials, and urge the Thai government to build on its successful cases in the past year to identify and investigate new cases of forced labour, debt bondage, and sex trafficking.

Thai law enforcement, social workers, and civil society collaboratively identified and assisted hundreds of trafficking survivors in 2015. Additional effective efforts, however, are needed across

agencies and with civil society partners, to better recognise indicators of human trafficking, and assist and empower survivors.

The report urges Thailand to continue to improve the consistency of victim identification procedures; prioritise the rights, freedoms, and safety of potential victims; and implement new rules to confer legal status and work permits to trafficking victims. We also encourage the government to actively scrutinise and improve labour recruitment practices through official and non-official channels for migrant workers.

In 2015, Thailand took steps to address official complicity, including sentencing two public officials to prison terms; but corruption and official complicity continued to impede anti-trafficking efforts, and many cases involving allegedly complicit officials remained pending. Reports persist that some government officials profit from bribes and direct involvement in the extortion of migrants and their sale to brokers, exacerbating their vulnerability to sexual servitude, forced labor, or debt bondage. Thailand established specialised anti-human trafficking divisions within the Bangkok Criminal Court and the Office of the Attorney General. These institutions began to review cases and we look forward to observing the results of these specialised bodies, as they continue to acquire additional resources and expertise. Among sex trafficking cases, efforts to investigate child cases and the creation of the Thai Internet Crimes Against Children (TICAC) Task Force led to arrests of both foreign and Thai traffickers.

We will continue to urge the Thai government to make tangible progress in line with recommendations outlined in the 2016 TIP Report. The US government is committed to working closely with the government and the people of Thailand to address this significant challenge.

The Statement on 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report was released by the US embassy in Thailand on June 30, 2016.