

## **Thailand has made significant efforts on combating human trafficking**

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Thailand took its fight against human trafficking to new levels in 2015. We are aware this battle is not yet over, but it is one we are committed to winning. The Prime Minister has made the fight against human trafficking an urgent national priority.

During the past year, we increased resources, tools and manpower. New laws and regulations were passed, while old ones, such as our 2008 Anti-Human Trafficking Law, were strengthened. These laws also cover crimes related to human trafficking, such as child pornography, money laundering, labor rights, victim's rights and regulations covering the long-neglected fishing industry.

And these laws are being enforced. Our police and justice system have been vigorous in pursuit of traffickers. We are the first country in Southeast Asia with specialized anti-human trafficking agencies in every step of the criminal justice process. Prosecutors brought 53 percent more trafficking cases to court compared to 2014, and 35 percent of convictions resulted in jail sentences of more than 10 years, with one more than 22 years.

More victims were helped with social services, protections and rehabilitation. A total of 471 victims were cared for in government shelters in 2015, up 55 percent from the year before. They received counseling, job training, educational and work opportunities, and were assisted with repatriation or relocation to third countries if the situation permitted. Early in March, the Cabinet also approved a measure that allows victims to remain in Thailand and work legally for a minimum of one year, up from six months.

We have a long history of giving safe haven to refugees and those in need of protection. In March 2016, the Ministry of Interior requested all districts to identify and issue legal status to eligible stateless students in Thailand under the government's database. This directive was hailed by the UNHCR as it may benefit up to 65,000 students, or about 15 per cent of the 443,862 people who were registered as stateless in Thailand at the end of October 2015.

Our fishing and seafood industries were more closely monitored. Vessels larger than 30 gross tons were required to have tracking systems. We took action against boats committing illegal acts, including labor abuse. Workers received increased protections and education on their rights, including the right to leave abusive employers and find better places to work.

The private sector has also joined us in this fight. In January this year, several Thai seafood companies signed an agreement pledging not to source goods from suppliers engaged in illegal fishing, abusive labor practices or human trafficking. Our major seafood firms have joined the *Shrimp Sustainable Supply Chain Task Force*, which unites Thai firms with U.S.-based manufacturers and retailers, government and civil society groups in developing clean supply chains.

Thailand's accession to the Port State Measures Agreement last week provided momentum for this FAO accord to enter into force. It will not only fight illegal fishing but also preserve the ecosystem and marine biodiversity.

From our friends in the US Administration and Capitol Hill, I humbly ask two things.

First, partnerships are essential to defeat trafficking. More sharing of intelligence, technical expertise and cooperation will help us in this fight.

Here, I wish to commend the FBI and Bangkok-based International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) for their training courses for Thai and regional law enforcement officers on combating transnational crimes. I have met senior Thai police officers who cited their valuable training from the FBI in helping them bring traffickers to justice.

Second, we ask that Thailand be judged fairly in the annual Trafficking in Persons Report 2016, due to be released next month. The State Department's criteria in its report are whether or not a government is "making significant efforts" to "comply with minimum standards." The evidence outlined in this report speaks for itself.

We know that we cannot be complacent. We know that there will always be room for improvement and there are challenges still to overcome. Sustainable efforts, strong partnerships, and time will be required. But we are certain that Thailand is moving forward in the right direction. Stronger partnership between Thailand and the United States will be essential going forward. Together, our two countries can go a long way to help end this scourge of human trafficking.

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