

News

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UN Urges Asia to Enforce Human Trafficking Laws

Ron Corben, VOA | Bangkok



Photo: AP

Senior United Nations officials say countries of the Greater Mekong Sub-region including Cambodia remains a Tier 2 country, putting it on a category above China, which China is a watch list, and Burma, which is a major source of trafficking. Other Tier 2 countries in Asia include Indonesia, Laos and Singapore.

Thailand, Cambodia and Laos are failing to apply existing laws aimed at combating human trafficking. The conclusions come as a U.N. envoy on human trafficking concluded a 10-day assessment of Thailand's efforts to curb labor migration abuses.

The U.N.'s Special Rapporteur on Human Trafficking, Joy Ezeilo, says countries need to adopt a comprehensive approach to combat trafficking and implement laws that are already on the books.

Some progress made

"If one looks at Laos and Cambodia, the question is also about the capacity of the government to develop and implement their legislation."

Ezeilo said in Thailand, authorities have made 'significant progress' but officials are still not doing enough to protect irregular migrants and overcome corruption.

"We need a comprehensive approach to combating human trafficking. I think implementation is actually where the challenge is, because you may have very good laws, very good national plans - and actually done a lot in the sense of rehabilitative measures to assist trafficked persons, but then with the gap to the application of the law - it should [be] comprehensive in prosecution, punishment of traffickers," she said.

After assessing Thailand's efforts to curb abuses, Ezeilo said the country remains a source, transit and destination country for trafficking.

The report said Thais are trafficked to China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Germany, Israel, Japan, South Africa and the United States. Thailand also is a receiver nation from Cambodia, Burma, Laos and Vietnam.

Children targeted

Ezeilo said within Thailand, internal trafficking of children is also rampant, including children of hill tribe communities.

The trafficking fuels child prostitution, pornography and sex tourism. Other traffickers target workers for domestic help, begging, forced marriage and surrogacy. The report said the practice is growing in the agricultural, construction and fisheries industries.

Human trafficking is estimated to be worth millions of dollars to criminal gangs across the region.

The U.N.'s International Labor Organization (ILO) has backed efforts to implement programs to protect migrant workers from Cambodia, China, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.

But Nilim Baruah, a chief technical advisor with the ILO office in Bangkok, says despite the effort countries in the region, including Cambodia and Laos, have failed to apply their own laws to better regulate labor migration.

"Management and governance of migration continues to be a major area of concern for government

in the Mekong Sub Region," said Baruah. "If one looks at Laos and Cambodia, the question is also about the capacity of the government to develop and implement their legislation. In terms of Laos and Cambodia there is a need for capacity building and training from the part of the government themselves."

Comprehensive approach

Martin Reeve, a regional advisor to the U.N.'s Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) agrees a comprehensive approach is needed to curb human trafficking beyond law enforcement and include other sectors of the community, including business.

"Certainly law enforcement can't do it on its own, neither can government policy, neither can civil society," said Reeve. "So really you do need a multilateral approach to this - the business community. The business community can look at its own practices and to make sure that it's not involving exploitative labor at any point during the supply process - and that's a key thing."

Thailand implemented a process of documentation and registration of over one million migrant workers over the past years, mostly from Burma as well as Cambodia and Laos. The latest campaign to register the workers, largely from the fishing industry, ended this month. A full report by the U.N. Special Rapporteur, Ezeilo, is expected to be presented to the U.N. in mid-2012.

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