

JOINT STATEMENT

Kari A. Johnstone
Principal Deputy Director
Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons
U.S. Department of State

Alex Lee
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs

James Carouso
Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Before the
House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Global Human Rights, and International Organizations
Hearing on the 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report

November 4, 2015

Thank you Congressman Smith and members of this subcommittee for inviting us here today to talk about the 2015 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. It has been my distinct honor to be associated with this Report and to lead the work of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons in recent months.

I also want to thank Deputy Assistant Secretary Alex Lee and Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary Jim Carouso for testifying alongside me. Producing the annual TIP Report is a year-round Department-wide effort involving hundreds of staff in Washington and at U.S. embassies and consulates around the world. The final report – as approved by the Secretary of State – reflects the Department’s best assessment of foreign government efforts to comply with the minimum standards to eliminate human trafficking as outlined in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA).

I know how important the issue of modern slavery is to Congress and, on behalf of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP Office) and the

entire Department, I thank you very much for your sustained commitment. Last week, Ambassador Coppedge and the TIP Office recognized the 15th anniversary of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Over these last 15 years, we have learned that the TVPA's legal framework is what makes the TIP Report such an effective tool in combating human trafficking across the globe. The TVPA establishes clear "minimum standards" for the elimination of trafficking in persons and delineates additional criteria for the Department to assign tier rankings to governments according to the quality of their anti-trafficking efforts. In the last 15 years, human trafficking has gone from a niche issue that received very little attention to one found in multiple headlines across the globe every single day.

Since the passage of the TVPA, the State Department – through the TIP Report, sustained diplomatic engagement, and foreign assistance programs – has helped to draw public attention to the issue of human trafficking and urged foreign governments to take meaningful steps to address this crime. It is often referred to as the gold standard for anti-trafficking efforts and I have learned during my time leading the TIP Office that it truly lives up to that designation. Not only is it one of the most effective diplomatic tools our government has for encouraging a foreign government to take action and make progress in combating modern slavery, it also gives voice to the many stakeholders working on the front lines of the problem – whether they be government officials who want to see change in their country, activists who confront the crime wherever it occurs, or professionals providing services to victims around the world. And it serves a compelling public awareness function by conveying the human face of the world's trafficking crimes to its readers. There is much to be proud of in this Report.

As with past reports, the 2015 TIP Report is the product of a full year of hard work and dedication by our staff in the TIP Office, the many bureaus and offices here in Washington, and our missions around the world.

Throughout the year, Department experts worked with foreign governments and civil society to collect data and objectively assess each government's efforts to meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking laid out in the TVPA. Using this comprehensive factual analysis, and in accordance with the minimum standards, countries were assigned a tier ranking – Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 2 Watch List, or Tier 3. As is standard practice in the Department, tier ranking

decisions went through an extensive and rigorous process that reflects coordination and dialogue within the Department and helps to make the report as objective and accurate as possible.

In most cases, the factors leading to the tier placement of a country are agreed upon throughout the Department in early discussions. At times, however, they require further discussion among senior Department officials in a process that ultimately leads to the Secretary's final decisions. This is consistent with Department practice in the context of other annual reports and procedures.

As always, the tier rankings reflect government efforts to increase prosecutions, improve protections, and enhance prevention efforts to combat modern slavery, not the extent of human trafficking in any particular country. We saw tangible progress in many places in the world: many governments adopted new anti-trafficking laws or strengthened existing laws, strengthened their law enforcement efforts to convict and punish traffickers, increased inter-governmental coordination to combat human trafficking by establishing senior-level bodies and enacting national action plans, and improved victim protection measures. Between April 2014 and March 2015, Afghanistan, Angola, Barbados, the Czech Republic, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, and Sudan became parties to the 2000 UN TIP Protocol. Of the 188 countries and territories assessed in the 2015 TIP Report, 18 countries were upgraded. Unfortunately, we also saw efforts fall short in the 18 countries that were downgraded. Much work remains, and all of us must continue to improve our efforts to fight this crime.

We will continue to use the Report to elevate human trafficking and encourage governments to implement the actions recommended in the TIP Report. Department staff in Washington and overseas draw from the Report to inform efforts to raise public awareness about human trafficking, build foreign government and civil society capacity through training and assistance, and urge governments to address human trafficking with effective action. Secretary Kerry personally raises the issue with foreign leaders, as he recently did in Cuba and Malaysia. Ultimately, the purpose of the Report – and our shared goal – is to effect change. We consider ways we can strengthen the recommendations in the Report and use them more effectively to push progress through year-round engagement. Our anti-trafficking foreign assistance programs provide tangible

support to implement TIP Report recommendations by governments, civil society, and international organizations. We continuously review how we can use the Report even more effectively as a lever to motivate tangible progress around the world.

For example, I just returned from a productive trip to Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and China during which I urged these governments to make stronger efforts to combat human trafficking and implement the recommendations in the 2015 TIP Report. I was pleased to see that every official I met was aware of our assessments in the 2015 TIP Report. I will not claim these officials fully agreed with our assessments, but the Report and minimum standards have clearly focused attention on the realities of modern slavery and the tangible steps required to combat this crime.

Amidst all the important information found in the annual TIP Report, one message becomes clear year after year – human trafficking is a challenge in nearly every corner of the globe as it is here in the United States. Governments all over the world, including those on Tier 1, struggle to keep up with a crime that affects millions of individuals compelled into service for sex or labor or both. We must all continuously improve our efforts to fight and end this crime.

We know our work is critical. We remain committed to addressing these challenges. And we look forward to helping create a world free from modern slavery.

Thank you.