

**Accountability Over Politics:
Scrutinizing the Trafficking in Persons Report**

**State Department Testimony of
Ambassador Susan Coppedge
for the
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Global Human Rights, and International Organizations
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Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Bass, Members of the Subcommittee. I am happy to be before you today to continue our discussion on human trafficking and our recently released 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this critical foreign policy issue. The Subcommittee has been a consistent champion of global efforts to combat human trafficking, and I thank you for all the work you do to raise awareness on the issue. Your dedication to ending modern slavery has helped strengthen the worldwide response to this insidious crime, while establishing the United States as a world leader in this important fight.

Two weeks ago, on June 30, Secretary Kerry publicly released the 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report and honored the work of our TIP Report Heroes. The TIP Report Heroes are a truly impressive and diverse group which has dedicated their lives to fighting human trafficking including combating hereditary slavery in Mauritania, bonded labor in Pakistan, forced child begging in Senegal, sex trafficking in Russia, and increasing prosecutions and victim protection in Cyprus, the Bahamas, Botswana, and Nepal.

The Trafficking in Persons Report is a symbol of U.S. global leadership on combating human trafficking, and our principal diagnostic tool to assess government efforts across the 3Ps: **prosecuting** traffickers, **protecting** and empowering victims, and **preventing** future trafficking crimes.

The TIP Report reflects a whole-of-Department effort. It is the product of a year of research and reporting by my office—the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in

Persons—regional bureaus, and U.S. embassies around the world informed by their collective engagement with foreign government officials, NGOs, faith groups, and international organizations. It provides country-specific narratives for 188 countries and territories, including the United States, and places them on one of four tiers representing the extent to which they meet the “minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking” as outlined in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act or TVPA.

Of the countries analyzed in the 2016 Report, 36 were placed on Tier 1, 78 on Tier 2, 44 on Tier 2 Watch List, and 27 on Tier 3. In all, there were 27 downgrades and 20 upgrades. No matter which tier a country is placed on, every nation can and should do more to combat human trafficking, which is why the Report offers recommendations for improvements for every country, even Tier 1 countries like the United States.

The TIP Report is more than just an analysis of what countries are doing to combat trafficking. It is, above all else, an instrument of diplomacy—a means to effect change and motivate tangible progress in combating the many forms of trafficking. Since the enactment of the TVPA in 2000 and the TIP Report’s first publication in 2001, the Report has prompted foreign governments to enact legislation, establish national action plans, and implement anti-trafficking policies and programs. And, each year, the Report and the Department’s year-round diplomatic efforts on trafficking spur further progress. There are some places where these efforts bore fruit in the past year, and other countries where we saw backsliding.

One example of progress is the Philippines. A strong, coordinated government effort to combat human trafficking across the 3Ps earned the government a Tier 1 ranking after two years on Tier 2 Watch List and five years on Tier 2. During the last reporting period, the Philippines convicted 42 traffickers, including several complicit government officials, fulfilling the top recommendation from the previous TIP Report. The Philippines proactively identified trafficking victims exploited within the country, assisting roughly 1,500 during the reporting period; enhancing services available for victims, particularly male victims, was a key recommendation in the previous TIP Report. In an effort to

prevent trafficking of migrant workers, the government increased its funding for the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, which runs anti-trafficking prevention campaigns for migrant workers. These are just a few of the efforts the government has undertaken, which reflect the concerted attention many Philippine government agencies have given to combating trafficking. Such a balanced and holistic approach is necessary for governments to effectively combat modern slavery.

The Philippines is also an example of successful targeting of U.S. anti-trafficking foreign assistance. The Department has funded programs over the last ten years, including grants to dedicated and well-respected anti-trafficking NGOs, to help the government improve its efforts, leading to the creation of a dedicated anti-trafficking unit and an increase in the number of prosecutions and convictions. Our office looks forward to continuing foreign assistance to countries that have the political will to combat human trafficking, but insufficient financial means and/or technical expertise. And we will continue to urge the Philippines to make tangible progress in line with recommendations in the 2016 TIP Report; as with all Tier 1 countries, its work is far from done.

Unfortunately, there are several countries that have not made progress this year. For example, Sudan was ranked Tier 3 this year, largely because the government continued to deny the existence of sex trafficking of adults and children, and did not report efforts to address forced labor. Sudanese authorities continued to punish trafficking victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking, such as immigration violations, and that undermines any effort to establish a victim-centered approach. Another example is Serbia, where efforts to identify victims and prosecute traffickers decreased, and the government did not afford victims sufficient protection in criminal proceedings or provide them with specialized services. We will continue our firm diplomacy both bilaterally and multilaterally to make clear to all governments that progress in combating human trafficking is a key priority of the American government as well as a commitment of all governments under the Palermo Protocol.

Globally, we saw some promising positive trends representing growing political will. Since last year, 30 countries adopted or amended trafficking laws, one of the highest numbers in recent years. The adoption of effective anti-trafficking laws provides the foundation for states to prosecute traffickers and provide for victim services. Three states became parties to the landmark UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons: the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, and Singapore, bringing the total to 169. The 2016 TIP Report includes the largest number of Tier 1 countries since the inception of the Report.

While many governments reported increasing convictions, the reported figures still pale in comparison to the global scale of human trafficking. Further, in some countries, courts are not imposing sentences for traffickers that are sufficient to deter future criminal activity or reflective of the heinous nature of this crime. Some states, for example, regularly suspend sentences for convicted traffickers; this may lead to an environment of de facto impunity. The country narratives recommend where governments should increase prosecutions, impose more stringent sentences, or better quantify their efforts.

It is important to note that the findings in the Report are one component of a continuous process. We use the analysis and recommendations in the Report as a roadmap to guide U.S. diplomacy on human trafficking year-round. Not only does the Secretary personally raise the Report recommendations with foreign leaders, as he mentioned at the Report rollout, but officials at all levels of the Department engage with their foreign counterparts year-round, using the Report's findings as a guide. The Report's conclusions also inform our foreign assistance programming. With the help of our other Department and interagency colleagues, my office will develop focused anti-trafficking programming strategies for each region that will prioritize countries according to their need for assistance and their political will to make improvements.

In addition to narratives for each country, the introduction to this year's TIP Report focuses on effective strategies to prevent human trafficking. We witnessed a broad range of prevention efforts during the reporting period, from strategic intervention programs

that reach at-risk populations before they are faced with deceitful recruitment practices, to public-private partnerships that leverage expertise and facilitate creative solutions, and targeted information campaigns that help communities respond to the threat of human trafficking and reduce demand. I'll just share a few examples with you today.

Several countries and NGOs have increased efforts to legally register marginalized populations. In Vietnam, an NGO helped register more than 2,000 ethnic minorities in areas at high risk for human trafficking. Legal registration facilitates access to formal education, health care, and employment in the formal economy and significantly decreases risk factors for potential victims.

In Guatemala, a leading coffee company, with government support, partnered with a U.S. labor rights organization to better understand the risks of recruitment abuses that lead to forced labor. The partners are strengthening communication between workers, the employer, and the government to better report and monitor recruitment practices in the coffee sector.

In Slovakia, the government launched a public awareness campaign that warned citizens seeking employment abroad to be wary of too-good-to-be-true employment offers, reaching 750,000 Slovak-language Facebook users with a prevention message. The government also launched a website that allows Slovaks traveling abroad for employment to register their family or friends and have the website send alerts should the user fail to check in online on a pre-established schedule.

We are extremely encouraged by such prevention efforts. Yet much work remains. The 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report draws attention to several areas for improvement in the country narratives, but I would like to highlight a few that are of particular importance: the need for increased protection for domestic workers and stronger efforts to root out corrupt and complicit officials who are themselves engaged in or benefiting from trafficking. In addition, we need to put in place protections for victims so they are not penalized for crimes committed as a direct result of trafficking and to increase

support services available to victims. In my travels and bilateral meetings so far, I have raised these issues and focused on not criminalizing trafficking victims for crimes committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

Again, I am honored to be here today. I am very proud of the hard work that went into this Report, and I look forward to using it to advance our ongoing diplomatic efforts to combat trafficking in the months ahead. I look forward to your questions.