



TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS REPORT
JUNE 2017





DEAR READER:

Human trafficking is one of the most tragic human rights issues of our time. It splinters families, distorts global markets, undermines the rule of law, and spurs other transnational criminal activity. It threatens public safety and national security.

But worst of all, the crime robs human beings of their freedom and their dignity. That's why we must pursue an end to the scourge of human trafficking.

Today we take another key step towards that goal. The 2017 *Trafficking in Persons Report* highlights the successes achieved and the remaining challenges before us on this important global issue.

In particular, the introduction of this year's Report focuses on the responsibility of governments to criminalize human trafficking and hold offenders accountable. To that end, this Report is intended to assist governments in identifying threats so law enforcement agencies around the world can respond effectively and gain insight into where human trafficking remains most severe. The Report will also equip local and sub-national law enforcement agencies to better assist in efforts to target and prosecute those who commit these terrible crimes.

Because human trafficking is global in scope, international partners are essential to success. That's why the State Department will continue to establish positive partnerships with governments, civil society, law enforcement groups, and survivors to provide help for those who need our support.

The United States is a leader in the fight against human trafficking. We seek justice for victims and accountability for offenders. This Report is instrumental to our strategy to end human trafficking. I am proud of the work and dedication of the Department towards that end, and remain committed to the elimination of human trafficking here and abroad.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rex W. Tillerson".

Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary of State



DEAR READER:

This year, the theme of the *Trafficking in Persons Report* is increasing criminal accountability of human traffickers and addressing challenges in prosecution—an essential component of the 3P paradigm of prosecution, protection, and prevention. As a former federal prosecutor in the United States and now as Ambassador-at-Large to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, this topic is deeply personal to me.

I am particularly and acutely aware of the lives destroyed by human trafficking. I will never forget a young woman in a case I prosecuted, a survivor who I'll call Teresa. She was raised in Central America by her grandmother, and as a young woman, was deceived by a man she thought cared for her with promises of love and a better life. That man brought Teresa to the United States and, instead of building a new life with her, forced her into commercial sex, took all the money she was paid, and intimidated her with threats of deportation and

humiliation before her family. His threats not only instilled fear in Teresa and coerced her into exploitation; they also convinced her she was a criminal for violating federal immigration and local anti-prostitution laws.

There are people like Teresa trapped in compelled service all over the world who fear that justice systems will punish them, rather than convict and incarcerate their traffickers—and in reality their fears are often justified. Teresa ultimately stood before a judge in a case against her trafficker and shared her experience in a court of law. What's more, she saw her trafficker convicted and sentenced to jail, and she received an award of restitution for the money he made by exploiting her. When the case was over, I was able to return to Teresa a picture she had carried with her to the United States of her grandmother, who had since passed away—a memory of her prior life. While governments can never fully reverse the trauma of human trafficking, they can help survivors pursue the justice they deserve and return to a life of their choosing, a life with dignity and free will.

When I engage with representatives of foreign governments, I often speak with police, investigators, prosecutors, and judges. I commend those who are fearless in the fight against human trafficking—those who courageously take on the tough cases, those who argue for stringent sentences for criminals and restitution for victims, and those who do so while ensuring that victims are treated with dignity. A victim-centered and trauma-informed approach requires, first and foremost, that the criminal justice system not penalize victims of human trafficking when they are forced to commit crimes as a direct result of their exploitation. When forced criminality takes place as part of the scheme, victims should not be further punished by the very system meant to protect them; and when they are, their convictions should be expunged and they should receive support and the comprehensive services to which they are entitled.

In my time serving as Ambassador-at-Large, I have had the incredible honor of meeting inspiring individuals who fight each day to end modern slavery. I have seen first-hand how those on the ground in countries around the world implement effective strategies to combat human trafficking. Having the benefit and honor of these experiences, I am confident that we are closer than ever to creating strong communities where justice and freedom prevail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Coppedge". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Susan Coppedge
Ambassador-at-Large to Monitor
and Combat Trafficking in Persons



A police officer keeps watch over a brothel in Peru. When law enforcement officers moonlight as security for brothels, they are often complicit in sex trafficking and other illicit activities.

“The scale of human trafficking is atrocious. The silence that conceals this crime is disgraceful. We have to speak out because the victims are living in fear for their lives. We have to raise our voices for them. That means confronting the social and economic conditions that abet this crime. It means arresting the traffickers. And above all, it means protecting the victims.”

– Former United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

ENHANCING CRIMINAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND ADDRESSING CHALLENGES IN PROSECUTION EFFORTS

The modern anti-trafficking movement commenced in earnest with the adoption of the Palermo Protocol in 2000, and since then has grown substantially. Governments have made progress and continue to work to pass and implement legislation criminalizing all forms of human trafficking, collaborate with civil society and human trafficking survivors to strengthen victim protections at the policy and grassroots levels, and take prevention measures and raise public awareness about the dangers and indicators of modern slavery. While this progress is encouraging, traffickers around the world continue to exploit millions of victims in forced labor and sex trafficking. This multi-billion dollar industry destroys families and communities, weakens the rule of law, strengthens criminal networks, and offends universal concepts of human decency. Although support from civil society and international organizations has led to more holistic and effective anti-trafficking solutions, governments bear primary responsibility for addressing human trafficking. That is why the *Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report* annually measures government efforts across the 3P paradigm of prosecuting traffickers, protecting victims, and preventing the crime.

In the last five years, the Introduction to this Report has examined the protection and prevention elements of this paradigm to enhance understanding of the crime and highlight global trends and achievements in combating it. For instance, the Report has explained the importance of using a victim-centered approach to identify and protect victims, and also to effectively prosecute trafficking cases. It has taken a hard look at the journey from victim to survivor and at the support survivors need to reclaim their lives. And it has profiled a wide range of effective strategies to prevent human trafficking, including by examining vulnerabilities in global supply chains. This year's Introduction focuses on prosecution efforts—the distinct responsibility governments bear under the Palermo Protocol to criminalize human trafficking in all its forms and to prosecute and hold offenders accountable for their crimes. Human trafficking is not analogous to migrant smuggling (a crime against a state by which an individual voluntarily enters into an agreement with another party to gain illegal entry into a foreign country) or employment-related wage and hour abuses (administrative violations of labor law). Under the minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), an effective criminal justice response to human trafficking should treat the prosecution of cases as seriously as other grave crimes, such as kidnapping or rape, and impose consequences that are severe enough to be a deterrent.

METHODOLOGY

The Department of State prepared this Report using information from U.S. embassies, government officials, nongovernmental and international organizations, published reports, news articles, academic studies, research trips to every region of the world, and information submitted to tipreport@state.gov. This email address provides a means by which organizations and individuals can share information with the Department of State on government progress in addressing trafficking. U.S. diplomatic posts and domestic agencies reported on the trafficking situation and governmental action to fight trafficking based on thorough research that included meetings with a wide variety of government officials, local and international NGO representatives, officials of international organizations, journalists, academics, and survivors. U.S. missions overseas are dedicated to covering human trafficking issues year-round. The 2017 *Trafficking in Persons Report* covers government efforts undertaken from April 1, 2016 through March 31, 2017.

Tier Placement

The Department places each country in this Report onto one of four tiers, as mandated by the TVPA. This placement is based not on the size of the country's problem but on the extent of governments' efforts to meet the TVPA's minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking (see page 38), which are generally consistent with the Palermo Protocol. While Tier 1 is the highest ranking, it does not mean that a country has no human trafficking problem or that it is doing enough to address the problem. Rather, a Tier 1 ranking indicates that a government has acknowledged the existence of human trafficking, has made efforts to address the problem, and meets the TVPA's minimum standards. Each year, governments need to demonstrate appreciable progress in combating trafficking to maintain a Tier 1 ranking. Indeed, Tier 1 represents a responsibility rather than a

reprieve. A country is never finished with the job of fighting trafficking. Tier rankings and narratives in the 2017 *Trafficking in Persons Report* reflect an assessment of the following:

- enactment of laws prohibiting severe forms of trafficking in persons, as defined by the TVPA, and provision of criminal punishments for trafficking offenses;
- criminal penalties prescribed for human trafficking offenses with a maximum of at least four years' deprivation of liberty, or a more severe penalty;
- implementation of human trafficking laws through vigorous prosecution of the prevalent forms of trafficking in the country and sentencing of offenders;
- proactive victim identification measures with systematic procedures to guide law enforcement and other government supported front-line responders in the process of victim identification;
- government funding and partnerships with NGOs to provide victims with access to primary health care, counseling, and shelter, allowing them to recount their trafficking experiences to trained social workers and law enforcement in an environment of minimal pressure;
- victim protection efforts that include access to services and shelter without detention and with legal alternatives to removal to countries in which victims would face retribution or hardship;
- the extent to which a government ensures victims are provided with legal and other assistance and that, consistent with domestic law, proceedings are not prejudicial to victims' rights, dignity, or psychological well-being;
- the extent to which a government ensures the safe, humane, and to the extent possible, voluntary repatriation and reintegration of victims;
- governmental measures to prevent human trafficking, including efforts to curb practices identified as contributing factors to human trafficking, such as employers' confiscation of foreign workers' passports and allowing labor recruiters to charge prospective migrants recruitment fees; and
- governmental efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts and international sex tourism.

Tier rankings and narratives are NOT affected by the following:

- efforts, however laudable, undertaken exclusively by nongovernmental actors in the country;
- general public awareness events—government-sponsored or otherwise—lacking concrete ties to the prosecution of traffickers, protection of victims, or prevention of trafficking; and
- broad-based law enforcement or developmental initiatives.

A Guide to the Tiers

Tier 1

The governments of countries that fully meet the TVPA's minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking.

Tier 2

The governments of countries that do not fully meet the TVPA's minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.

Tier 2 Watch List

The government of countries that do not fully meet the TVPA's minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards, and for which:

- a. the *absolute number* of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing;
- b. there is a failure to provide evidence of *increasing efforts* to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year, including increased investigations, prosecution, and convictions of trafficking crimes, increased assistance to victims, and decreasing evidence of complicity in severe forms of trafficking by government officials; or

c. the determination that a country is making significant efforts to bring itself into compliance with minimum standards was based on commitments by the country to take *additional steps over the next year*.

Tier 3

The governments of countries that do not fully meet the TVPA's minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so.

The TVPA lists additional factors to determine whether a country should be on Tier 2 (or Tier 2 Watch List) versus Tier 3: first, the extent to which the country is a country of origin, transit, or destination for severe forms of trafficking; second, the extent to which the country's government does not meet the TVPA's minimum standards and, in particular, the extent to which officials or government employees have been complicit in severe forms of trafficking; and third, reasonable measures that the government would need to undertake to be in compliance with the minimum standards in light of the government's resources and capabilities to address and eliminate severe forms of trafficking in persons.

A 2008 amendment to the TVPA provides that any country that has been ranked Tier 2 Watch List for two consecutive years and that would otherwise be ranked Tier 2 Watch List for the next year will instead be ranked Tier 3 in that third year. This automatic downgrade provision came into effect for the first time in the 2013 Report. The Secretary of State is authorized to waive the automatic downgrade based on credible evidence that a waiver is justified because the government has a written plan that, if implemented, would constitute making significant efforts to meet the TVPA's minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is devoting sufficient resources to implement the plan. The Secretary can only issue this waiver for two consecutive years. After the third year, a country must either go up to Tier 1 or 2 or down to Tier 3. Governments subject to the automatic downgrade provision are noted as such in the country narratives.

Funding Restrictions for Tier 3 Countries

Pursuant to the TVPA, governments of countries on Tier 3 may be subject to certain restrictions on assistance, whereby the President may determine not to provide U.S. government non-humanitarian, nontrade-related foreign assistance. In addition, the President may determine to withhold funding for government official or employee participation in educational and cultural exchange programs for certain Tier 3 countries. Consistent with the TVPA, the President may also determine to instruct the U.S. Executive Director of each multilateral development bank and the International Monetary Fund to vote against and use his or her best efforts to deny any loans or other uses of the institutions' funds to a designated Tier 3 country for most purpose (except for humanitarian, trade related, and certain development-related assistance). Alternatively, the President may waive application of the foregoing restrictions upon a determination that the provision to a Tier 3 country of such assistance would promote the purposes of the TVPA or is otherwise in the national interest of the United States. The TVPA also authorizes the President to waive funding restrictions if necessary to avoid significant adverse effects on vulnerable populations, including women and children.

Applicable funding restrictions apply for the next Fiscal Year, which begins October 1, 2017.

No tier ranking is permanent. Every country, including the United States, can do more. All countries must maintain and continually increase efforts to combat trafficking.

BELIZE: TIER 3

The Government of Belize does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so; therefore, Belize remained on Tier 3. Despite the lack of significant efforts, the government took some steps to address trafficking, including the identification of two trafficking victims; and the investigations of 10 trafficking cases and two continued prosecutions initiated in a previous year. However, the government did not begin any new prosecutions or convict

any traffickers. The government did not investigate or prosecute any public officials for alleged complicity in human trafficking-related offenses, despite reports of a significant level of official complicity. Despite the government's raids on commercial sex establishments, few trafficking crimes were uncovered due to limited intelligence-gathering, inconsistent application of formal victim identification procedures, and suspected complicity among some law enforcement officials.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BELIZE

Consistently implement formal procedures to identify and refer to care victims of sex and labor trafficking among vulnerable groups, and involve Spanish-speaking social workers, NGOs, or victim advocates in the process to ensure trafficking victims are not penalized for crimes committed as a direct result of trafficking; implement victim-centered procedures during raids, including conducting interviews in a safe and neutral location and separately from immigration inquiries; implement the anti-trafficking law by vigorously investigating and prosecuting suspected sex and labor traffickers, including complicit officials, and imposing adequate penalties on convicted traffickers; consider implementing measures to expedite trafficking prosecutions; continue to provide specialized victim care, in partnership with NGOs, and increase efforts to reintegrate victims; update and implement the national anti-trafficking plan; investigate and prosecute child sex tourists; amend laws to ensure penalties are commensurate with those prescribed for rape or kidnapping; and develop and implement a targeted campaign to raise awareness among clients of Belize's legal sex trade about the links between prostitution and trafficking.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained minimal anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act 2013 prohibits all forms of trafficking and prescribes penalties of one to eight years imprisonment for the trafficking of adults and up to 12 years imprisonment for the trafficking of children or a fine in lieu of imprisonment. When allowing for a fine in lieu of imprisonment, the prescribed punishment is not commensurate with those for other serious crimes, such as rape. The 2013 Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act criminalizes the facilitation of prostitution of children younger than 18. This law, however, does not prohibit adults from engaging in sexual activity with 16- and 17-yearold children in exchange for remuneration, gifts, goods, food, or other benefits if there is no third party involved—leaving children of this age group vulnerable to sex trafficking. The government reportedly investigated 10 trafficking cases compared to seven in 2015, but for the second consecutive year did not initiate any new prosecutions. Authorities continued two prosecutions from 2015. The government did not convict any traffickers in the reporting period. Observers reported that a lack of communication and

coordination between law enforcement and prosecutors hindered law enforcement efforts. The government did not provide detailed information on the pending investigations or prosecutions. The government's enforcement activity against suspected trafficking consisted of referrals from other government agencies and NGOs as well as raids on venues in Belize's sex trade. Few trafficking crimes were uncovered during these raids due to limited intelligence-gathering, inconsistent application of formal victim identification procedures, and suspected complicity among some law enforcement officials. Many off-duty police officers provided security for sex trade establishments, which may have inhibited police from investigating allegations of trafficking in the sex trade and may have dissuaded victims from reporting trafficking. The government did not investigate, prosecute, or convict any officials for complicity in trafficking crimes despite reports of complicity. The government provided anti-trafficking training to new law enforcement officers, and prosecutors attended workshops financed and delivered by an international organization. PROTECTION The government decreased efforts to protect trafficking victims. Authorities identified two victims in 2016 compared to seven sex trafficking victims in 2015 and 10 victims in 2014. The government identified 10 additional potential child sex trafficking victims, who were offered protection services. Although the government had formal written procedures to guide officials in identifying victims, in practice, officials did not consistently follow these procedures. The government did not report screening for indicators of trafficking of women and girls apprehended in raids on commercial sex establishments. There were anecdotal reports of women and girls, potentially including trafficking victims, arrested, jailed, or deported for immigration violations following raids. Victims' fear of detention or deportation may have contributed to their reluctance to report trafficking to law enforcement officers. The government partnered with NGOs and international organizations to provide training to teachers, national utility workers, social security board inspectors, and private employers in the tourism sector on human trafficking, victim identification, and reporting.

Identified victims could be referred to the Department of Human Services, although officials made decisions for protection on a case-by-case basis. In past years, adult victims were typically referred to an NGO shelter, while children were placed in foster homes. Experts questioned the appropriateness of placing victims in foster homes because of a lack of education about human trafficking for

some foster parents, uneven coordination and communication between government agencies and foster parents, and limited availability of psycho-social care for victims. NGOs were the main providers of limited medical care and psychological counseling for victims. The government encouraged victims to assist in investigations by providing witness protection and coordinating lodging; court delays and fear of retaliation by traffickers may have led foreign national victims to decline or withdraw cooperation with law enforcement and return to their home countries. The government had a policy to grant temporary residency status to victims willing to cooperate in investigations or prosecutions, seven potential trafficking victims received this benefit in 2016; one foreign victim identified in 2014 remained in the country and participated in a prosecution. Victims could apply for work permits, but the cost of 500 Belizean dollars (\$250) to obtain such permits imposed a significant barrier. Belize's antitrafficking law exempts victims from punishment for crimes committed as a result of being subjected to trafficking; however, NGOs reported that victims not formally identified by the government were commonly arrested, jailed, and deported.

PREVENTION The government maintained minimal prevention efforts. Its anti-trafficking council met quarterly and reportedly began work on a new national action plan; the 2012-2014 anti-trafficking national strategic plans remained largely unimplemented. The government, in partnership with an NGO, expanded its awareness campaign through television, posters, and billboards in English, Spanish, and Mandarin. Authorities continued to disseminate public service announcements on child sexual exploitation and the links between tourism and the demand

for commercial sex, but did not investigate, prosecute, or convict any child sex tourists. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for forced labor. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training for its diplomatic personnel. **TRAFFICKING PROFILE** Belize is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor. The UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons reported family members facilitate the sex trafficking of Belizean women and girls. In tourist regions, foreign child sex tourists, primarily from the United States, exploit child sex trafficking victims. Sex trafficking and forced labor of Belizean and foreign women and girls, primarily from Central America; occur in bars, nightclubs, brothels, and domestic service. LGBTI men, women, and children are vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking. Foreign men, women, and children—particularly from Central America, Mexico, and Asia—migrate voluntarily to Belize in search of work and are often exploited by traffickers who recruit victims using false promises of relatively high-paying jobs. Some migrants are subjected to forced labor in restaurants, shops, agriculture, and fishing or to sex trafficking. Trafficking-related complicity by government officials remains a problem.

The 2017 TIP Report assesses the anti-trafficking efforts of 187 countries, including the United States. The full Report can be accessed at: <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2017/>