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Ministry of Labour Clarifies Efforts to Address Human Trafficking Problems

Mr. Jirasak Sugandhajati, Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Labour, says efforts to prevent and suppress human trafficking have to cover imported and exported workers, noting that the ministry will take a multi-disciplinary team approach in inspection of fishing workers and trawlers to prevent the problem and to help remove Thailand from the Tier 2 Watch List.

In response to reports by foreign news agencies and human rights organizations that workers in Thai fishery sector were tortured, Mr. Jirasak such reports could affect Thailand's position in the U.S Trafficking in Persons Report. Last year, the Ministry of Labour showed real determinations to eliminate the problem. It signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Thailand's neighboring countries on employment cooperation in order to prevent human trafficking through imported workers. The move is expected to close down an avenue used by illegal brokers to lure workers in work in Thailand. A bilateral MoU was signed with Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia between 2010 and 2013. During the period, a total of 312,737 migrant workers were given a permit to work in Thailand. As for exported workers, the government has tried to be broker in sending Thai workers to work overseas. It sends workers to South Korea via EPS system and to Japan via IM Japan programme. It also sends Thai workers to Israel while workers are directly hired to work in Taiwan, Malaysia, Qatar, Singapore, Hong Kong and UAE. In 2013, a total of 14,509 Thai workers were sent to work overseas. Ten one- stop service centers have also been set up in regional areas to assist workers in oversea employment. At the center, job seekers have access to services from banks, health authorities, and job placement firms. A total of 45,865 job seekers used the service at the centers. Of them, 21,315 succeeded in securing an oversea job.

In 2013, the Ministry of Labour inspected a total of 2,267 fishery workers in 113 firms in 22 coastal provinces, consisting of 317 Thais, 1,407 Myanmar, 18 Laotians and 525 Cambodians. Twelve firms failed to fully comply with the Labour Protection Act and were told strictly comply with the law or they would face legal action if they were found to violate the law again. Some of these firms failed to arrange registration for workers and give their workers leave days.

Mr. Jirasak said Thailand plans to request to withdraw its sugarcane and clothing products from the U.S. list of products that may associate with child and forced labour after local operators gave cooperation with the government in addressing the problem. They had signed a MoU with the government on ways to address the problem. The Ministry of Labour has also improved the laws concerning protection of agricultural workers to ensure fair and equal protection.

On November 23, 2013, the Department of Labour Protection and Welfare also inspected a case concerning four Indian workers being lured to work on "Eurng Luang 2" trawler near Kor Nu Island and found that the Indian workers entered Thailand in July 2013. Their Indian broker received them at a port in Samut Prakan province and took them to work in Songkhla province. They were forced to work on the trawler for more than two months without getting a payment. Labour officials are gathering more

evidence to help the workers get their entitlements from their employer. As such the case could be counted as human trafficking, the department has asked the Anti- Human Trafficking Police Division to investigate the case and provide protection to the workers. It has also asked concerned agencies to take legal actions against their employer and reported the case to the Indian

Embassy in Thailand.

This year, the Ministry of Labour aims to achieve concrete outcomes in preventing and suppressing human trafficking. It takes the multi-disciplinary team approach to work with concerned agencies in carrying out inspection on 1,124 fishing trawlers and 38,360 workers in 22 coastal provinces. Such multi-disciplinary team inspection will also be conducted on shrimp, sugarcane and clothing industries. It will also improve labour inspection form, organize training for inspectors, work to legalize migrant workers, set up a database on fishing workers and trawlers to support coordination centers for fishery workers, improve relevant laws, and boost knowledge of targeted groups.