



Thailand stepping up action on human trafficking

Among the serious issues raised at the recent joint press conference of United States President Barack Obama and Thailand's Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra at Government House in Bangkok was one with which Thailand has been struggling yet making important gains in recent years – human trafficking. “The President and I discussed how to tackle transnational crime, and in particular human trafficking,” Prime Minister Yingluck told the press corps. “I reaffirm my commitment to fight human trafficking which is equal to modern day slavery.” President Obama, in turn, noted he was “very pleased to see the leadership that the prime minister has taken” on the issue.

The Prime Minister's government is backing up her words with deeds. Thailand is cooperating with the United States in capacity building for its law enforcement officers in dealing with trafficking, and is working with the International Labor Organization (ILO) in capacity building for inspectors and in developing Good Labor Practices. The government is taking urgent and concrete actions in prevention, protection of migrants and prosecution of traffickers. Thailand has also joined with Singapore in proposing a Regional Plan of Action on transnational crime to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). At the recent ASEAN Summit, the Thai prime minister voiced support for accelerating consideration of an ASEAN Convention on the issue.

Domestically, earlier in the month, Deputy Prime Minister Chalerm Yubambrung convened the recently established Anti-Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Committee and unveiled the government's Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan for 2013. The plan is wide-ranging, well-funded comprehensive and progressive in its approach and measures, and the Deputy Prime Minister wasted no time in ordering relevant ministries and agencies to take immediate steps or face serious consequences.

Among the first concrete results the Deputy Prime Minister demanded was for the Ministry of Labor to open seven regional centers overseeing labor in the fishing and shrimp industries. Although the plan for the centers had been announced earlier this year, Deputy Prime Minister Chalerm insisted that the ministry not waste time, and that they be operational by the end of November.

Human rights groups have alleged that Thailand's fishing industry is rife with forced labor of illegal migrants. While inspections have succeeded in identifying only a few actual cases, the abuses have damaged the reputations of the industry and the nation. The seven centers are tasked with arranging for legal contracted labor for the fishing industry, inspecting for abuses, and providing services for migrant and other laborers so that their rights are protected and respected. Furthermore, the Thai government

has now included frozen food production and processing and fishing boats among its list of the Worst Forms of Child Labor, as advised by the ILO.

Thailand's Action Plan outlines seven areas to be addressed with detailed steps and progressive measures to be taken spelled out:

- Effective preliminary victim identification
- Increase of efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking offenders and officials engaged in trafficking-related corruption
- Improvement of labor inspection standards and procedures
- Implementation of procedures to allow adult trafficked victims to temporarily stay in

Thailand and work outside of shelters • Protection of workers in the fishery industry • Working towards sustainable solutions to protect migrant workers • Ratifying the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime

Implement the Action Plan will be a challenge, but it is a challenge that Prime Minister Yingluck and the government are determined to meet. They have already begun taking the necessary steps to address this serious problem.