



## U.S report notes Thailand’s significant advancement in fighting child labor

Thailand’s progress in combating child labor was praised by the United States last week as the Kingdom was cited as one of ten countries worldwide that made the most advances in ending the scourge of child labor, according to the U.S. Department of Labor’s most recent report on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.



“In 2012, Thailand made a significant advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor,” the Department of Labor report said. It cited several legislative and regulatory measures passed by the Thai government that increased protections for children, but also urged the Kingdom to do more in the area of enforcement.

Thailand has been criticized by some **nongovernmental organizations** and children’s rights groups for the prevalence of child labor in some industries, especially fishing, food processing and agriculture. The Thai government has heeded the criticism and has been working with businesses and industry groups to try and end the practice, aside from toughening laws and increasing enforcement.

The report published statistics from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) that show that 13 percent of Thai children aged between 5 and 14 years are working, although 96 percent of children in that age group are also attending school.

Despite the praise from the United States for Thailand’s efforts, SurasakRiangkrul, Director-General of the Department of Foreign Trade, said the government and the private sector should still increase cooperation to prevent and solve the problems of child labor, forced labor and human trafficking.

Improvements in the country’s labor rights and practices will ultimately help its exports, he said, noting that some have been calling for boycotts against Thai fishery products because of allegations of forced and child labor in that industry.

In particular, the report noted that Thailand’s government had passed the Ministerial Regulation on Labor and Welfare Protection for Domestic Workers, which offers protections to child domestic workers, including setting the minimum age for domestic work at 15 years. Employing children as domestic workers is a common problem across Southeast Asia, and those children are sometimes victims of abuse by employers.

The Department of Labor also pointed to the government's updated list of hazardous occupations and working conditions prohibited to children, and the increased the minimum age for children to work in sea vessels from 16 to 18. "The government also announced a new provision to extend healthcare benefits for all Thai and migrant women and children, including free healthcare for children, and continued to participate in a project to eliminate child labor in the shrimp and seafood processing industry," the report said.