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Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs

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in East Asia and the Pacific”
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Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Rubio, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to share with you the Department of State’s latest findings on human trafficking in East Asia and the Pacific Islands. A few weeks ago, Secretary of State John F. Kerry released the 14th annual *Trafficking in Persons Report*. This year’s 432-page volume discusses the progress and ongoing challenges in fighting trafficking in persons in 188 countries and territories, including 29 countries and territories in the Asia-Pacific region. The world has come a long way in our shared fight against human trafficking over the past 14 years. But, with more than 20 million estimated trafficking victims around the world and fewer than 45,000 victims identified in 2013, we have much more work to do.

Today, I will discuss human trafficking in East Asia and the Pacific, what governments in the region are doing to combat it, and how the Department of State is supporting those efforts. The Department’s efforts in Asia require the close collaboration of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (the TIP Office) and the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. We are grateful for the leadership provided by Assistant Secretary Danny Russel, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Scot Marciel, and all of the Chiefs of Mission throughout the region. Their partnership and collaboration, and the work of their staff on this issue, are making our diplomacy and programs to combat trafficking and assist victims in Asia effective.

Regional Overview

A staggering portion of the world's trafficking victims come from East Asia. These victims include men, women, and children subjected to both forced labor and sex trafficking. Forced labor occurs in the fishing, agriculture, mining, textile, and domestic service sectors, and in factories that produce other goods. In parts of East Asia, there is also state-sponsored forced labor, including by state militaries. Migrant workers are especially vulnerable to forced labor and debt bondage – in their home countries or upon traveling to other countries for employment. The fishing industry continues to be plagued with forced labor and is in need of additional law enforcement action and anti-corruption efforts to curb abuses. Girls and women are forced into prostitution in bars, brothels, massage parlors, and other venues. Sex tourism in some countries fuels the sex trafficking of children. Governments in the region have typically had more success in identifying victims of, and prosecuting cases related to, sex trafficking than labor trafficking; however, more must be done to combat both forms of modern slavery.

Our thematic focus for the 2014 *Trafficking in Persons Report* is the “Journey from Victim to Survivor.” The impact of human trafficking is horrifying; those who escape modern slavery struggle to recover, heal, reclaim their lives, and become survivors. It is not an easy path, and true recovery is far from guaranteed. Governments must devote more resources and attention to help victims recover, restore their inner strength and personal voice, and return to their communities as survivors.

Partnerships between governments and the private sector can facilitate this process. As an example, shortly after President Obama's and Secretary Kerry's March 2014 visit to the Vatican, the State Department TIP Office announced its plans to partner with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Apostleship of the Sea to coordinate efforts by the Catholic Church and its partners to combat human trafficking. The project will focus on ramping up capacity around the world to identify and assist victims, particularly those trafficked in maritime labor, which is a significant problem in East Asia and the Pacific.

Accomplishments and Areas for Improvement

Over the past year, governmental efforts to eliminate human trafficking and assist victims varied dramatically across countries in East Asia and the Pacific.

Some countries and territories undertook laudable anti-trafficking efforts. The **Republic of Korea**, **Papua New Guinea**, and the **Solomon Islands** passed legislation to strengthen their anti-trafficking legal frameworks. The Government of the **Federated States of Micronesia** initiated a landmark prosecution of an alleged trafficker, declared a national day to spread awareness of trafficking, and implemented a national anti-trafficking action plan. The Chinese National People's Congress ratified a decision to abolish the "Re-education through Labor" (RTL) system, a systemic form of forced labor that had existed in **China** for decades. Although some media and NGOs report that the government ceased operations at many RTL camps, it has also been reported that the government converted some RTL facilities into different types of detention centers, some of which continue to employ forced labor. We welcome China's decision to abolish the RTL system and its subsequent steps to shutter RTL facilities, but remain deeply concerned that forced labor persists in some government institutions.

Other countries in the region demonstrated mixed efforts to combat trafficking over the past year.

The Government of **Burma** undertook efforts to improve its anti-trafficking response, but some military officials and insurgent militia continued to subject civilians to forced labor and recruit child soldiers. Burma remains the only country in East Asia on the U.S. government's Child Soldiers Prevention Act list. We welcome the military's release of 206 children illegally recruited into its ranks over the reporting period, and encourage the Burmese military to continue to take further steps to fulfill commitments it has made under the joint UN action plan to end child soldier recruitment.

The United States is partnering with Burma to improve its anti-trafficking efforts, formalized in 2012 through the U.S.-Myanmar Joint Plan on Trafficking in Persons. In support of this joint plan, the TIP Office is funding a \$500,000 project to help strengthen Burma's new Anti-Trafficking in Persons Division in the Ministry of Home Affairs by sharing best practices in the area of law enforcement investigation and victim-witness interviewing. Later this year, the TIP Office plans to fund a \$700,000 project that will contribute to prevention of trafficking and protection of victims by strengthening institutional and NGO capacities. In this way, the intervention will respond directly to the priority of the Joint Plan of Action to "encourage greater civil society participation in anti-trafficking efforts throughout the country." Funding anti-trafficking efforts in Burma will continue to be a priority in FY2015.

In **Cambodia**, the government developed guidelines for a standardized, nationwide system for the proactive identification of victims among vulnerable groups. Unfortunately, the government prosecuted and convicted fewer trafficking offenders and identified fewer victims than it did in the previous year. Effectively finalizing and implementing the guidelines will be critical to Cambodia's ability to identify more victims, assist them, and prosecute their traffickers.

We are also concerned that **Japan** has experienced a steady decline in the number of trafficking victims identified over the past nine years, despite no evidence of a diminution in the overall scale of the problem. Traffickers continue to use the government's Industrial Trainee and Technical Internship Program (TTIP) to subject victims to forced labor, and the program lacks adequate government oversight. The Japanese government convicted 31 sex traffickers in 2013 -- but no labor traffickers. It is working on initiatives to enhance oversight of the TTIP and improve its anti-trafficking response. We look forward to working with the Government of Japan over the coming year as they implement these proposed reforms.

A few countries did not demonstrate increased efforts to combat trafficking over the past year, and they were downgraded in the 2014 TIP Report.

The Government of **Malaysia** decreased its anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts and made minimal efforts to improve its victim protection regime. In Malaysia, the greatest need is to reform this flawed victim protection regime that detains foreign trafficking victims in government facilities for periods of time that sometimes exceed a year. The Government of Malaysia has announced plans to allow a limited set of foreign trafficking victims to have freedom of movement and the right to work, and for NGOs to operate a government funded shelter. We encourage the government to amend its laws and regulations to improve care for victims and enable all trafficking victims to travel and work outside government facilities. Malaysia identified significantly fewer victims in 2013 than in 2012 and only convicted nine traffickers despite the country's vast trafficking problem. Improving Malaysia's victim protection regime would also be expected to lead to more victims coming forward and providing testimony that leads to more successful prosecutions.

We have been committed to helping Malaysia achieve these goals. The TIP Office is currently programming \$750,000 to assist NGOs' anti-trafficking programming in Malaysia, and plans to fund training for Malaysian special

prosecutors and judges. We continue to encourage the Government of Malaysia to remove restrictions on NGOs assisting trafficking victims.

Despite improving its anti-trafficking data collection and prosecuting and convicting traffickers, the Government of **Thailand** failed to address key shortcomings in its anti-trafficking efforts, and its actions continued to be insufficient given the magnitude of the human trafficking problem in Thailand. During the period covered by the 2014 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, the Thai government made few efforts to address forced labor and debt bondage among foreign migrant workers – including in the fishing industry, which has a significant proportion of trafficking victims in Thailand. It failed to address widespread official complicity in human trafficking. We continue to call on the Thai government to take significantly greater steps to protect foreign migrants – including in the fishing and shrimp industries, to punish traffickers who enslave foreign workers, and to prosecute officials complicit in trafficking.

We welcome continued engagement with the Thai government to address our shared goals: to assist victims, convict traffickers, and prevent future instances of human trafficking from occurring. The TIP Office is currently programming \$1.2 million in Thailand to support anti-trafficking activities. This support includes funding to conduct prevention and protection-related activities, especially among tribal populations; enhance Thailand's Department of Special Investigation's ability to investigate trafficking cases; raise awareness and advocate for justice on high-level trafficking cases; coordinate government and NGO activities to combat human trafficking in the nine provinces of the upper northern region of Thailand and their associated Burmese and Lao border regions; and support coordination among the heads of specialist anti-trafficking units in ASEAN. Before the end of the current fiscal year, the TIP Office expects to provide an additional \$687,510 to support protection and prosecution-related activities and we anticipate providing continued assistance, pending congressional appropriation in FY 2015 and beyond.

In **Laos**, the government relied almost entirely on local and international organizations to implement anti-trafficking programs. It continued to prosecute trafficking offenses and convict traffickers, but did not make proactive efforts to identify victims of trafficking. We continue to encourage the government to expeditiously approve Memoranda of Understanding with anti-trafficking organizations to more effectively combat trafficking and coordinate government and NGO efforts. In FY 2010 and FY 2013, our office provided \$1 million to the

UNODC to assist the Government of Laos with legislative reform of its anti-trafficking law.

The Government of **Timor-Leste** did not investigate or prosecute any trafficking offenses or convict any traffickers. The government's victim identification efforts remained inadequate, and long-awaited anti-trafficking legislation remained pending.

Finally, one country in the region has continually failed to combat trafficking and has subjected its citizens to trafficking. **North Korea** did not demonstrate any effort to address human trafficking through prosecution, protection, or prevention measures. The government participated in human trafficking through its use of domestic forced labor camps and its provision of forced labor to foreign governments through bilateral contracts. North Korea also failed to protect victims of trafficking when they were forcibly repatriated from China or other countries.

The Way Forward

Over the past few weeks, the 2014 *Trafficking in Persons Report* and country tier rankings have received considerable international attention. The Report is an important tool to better understand human trafficking in 188 countries and territories around the world and to promote ways to better combat this global problem.

In accordance with the Trafficking Victim's Protection Act, as amended, each country and territory in the Report is assigned a tier ranking based on its government's compliance with certain minimum standards to eliminate trafficking. Tier rankings are important. But they are a means to an end, not an end unto themselves. We must not lose sight of the true goal: stopping modern slavery and helping victims of human trafficking. This includes victims like the six young women rescued from a bar by one of our grantees during the devastation of Typhoon Nari in the Philippines, where they had been trafficked and sold as sex slaves. After the rescue and with the storm raging and the power out, our grantee began the interview process by flashlight. The grantee reported that a targeted investment in law enforcement has brought about a nearly 80 percent reduction in the number of girls available for sex in the metropolitan area of Cebu. We agree with our grantee's assessment: "That kind of dramatic reduction can be replicated. It must be replicated." Only with such efforts, and concrete programs to help

victims find their voice and reclaim their lives, can we help victims become survivors.

During the rollout of the 2014 Report, we honored ten *Trafficking in Persons Report* Heroes from all over the world who are helping to make a difference. One Hero from Vietnam, Van Ngoc Ta, has personally assisted over 300 trafficking victims of forced labor in Vietnam and sex trafficking in China. Mr. Van's team works with Vietnamese authorities to arrange and implement a plan to facilitate victims' release and represents the victims in court against their traffickers. Mr. Van's tireless efforts have had an impressive positive impact on communities in Vietnam in which he conducts awareness campaigns and meets with leaders and families to educate them on prevention.

These are the types of efforts that must be duplicated around the world. I will now turn to my colleague Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Scot Marciel, with whom I work closely on efforts to combat trafficking. He will discuss U.S. diplomatic engagement on this issue, which is critical to advancing rule of law and human rights as important pillars of our foreign policy.