

Press Releases: Remarks at the 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report Launch Ceremony

Remarks
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AMBASSADOR COPPEDGE: Good morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

AMBASSADOR COPPEDGE: Welcome to the Department of State. We have quite the full room. My name is Susan Coppedge and I am the Ambassador-at-Large for the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Thank you all for joining us today for the release of the [17th Annual Trafficking in Persons Report](#). (Applause.) I was looking for a copy to hold up because I'm a prosecutor and I like my props. (Laughter.)

But a quick word about our program. First, our host, Secretary of State Tillerson, will share keynote remarks with us. Following additional remarks by Advisor to the President Ivanka Trump, we will honor our eight wonderful trafficking in person heroes and hear brief remarks from one of them. After the event concludes, I will invite you to pick up your own copy of the report. It is an honor to be here this morning with Secretary Tillerson and Ms. Trump, and I thank you both for elevating the issue of human trafficking and for your support of the Trafficking in Persons Office.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. (Applause.)

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, thank you so much, Susan, and welcome to all of you to the State Department for this important event, and particularly I'm

honored to welcome members of Congress, and in particular I want to highlight the leadership of Chairman Corker who's with us from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee this morning. Thank you. (Applause.) I think this really illustrates the dedication to combating human trafficking and the commitment of our country that we have this joint effort underway across the entire United States Government.

And I also want to thank Ambassador Coppedge for her 16-year career devoted to this issue. (Applause.) And I also know she doesn't do this alone, and we're grateful to her staff and also the many, many State Department colleagues at our embassies and our consulate offices who both help with the preparation of this report, but I think more importantly, they encourage governments to progress their efforts to combat human trafficking every day in our engagement with them.

I also want to welcome ambassadors and representatives from the foreign diplomatic corps. Our partnership with you, obviously, is essential to combating human trafficking as well.

And finally, I want to recognize the survivors of human trafficking as well as representatives of the many NGOs and international organizations who are with us today, and thank you for being here for this rollout of this report.

I think before I get to some of my prepared remarks, it's – since this was my first one of these to review and sign off on and make the report, I thought it useful to go back and read the original reason why we do this. This is the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, and that's really where this all began. And I think it is useful to remind us why we're here this morning, why we're gathered in this room, and what the United States Government and the people of the United States were really trying to express in this area.

And I think if you go back to the preamble to this act, I think it really sums it up well. It says, "The purpose of this act is to combat trafficking in persons, a contemporary manifestation of slavery, whose victims are predominantly women and children, to ensure just and effective punishment of traffickers, and to protect the victims." And then it – I want to read just one more line: "As the 21st century begins, the degrading institution of slavery continues throughout the world."

That is why we are here this morning. It then does – the act goes on to require that the State Department prepare this annual report to make an assessment of how governments around the world are taking action to address this. And I think it's really through actions what this act motivated and what the State Department is doing as it meets its obligation, is we're identifying first where the problems are: how do the problems manifest themselves – because they continue to evolve and take on new characteristics; how do we then work with governments to cause them to put in place laws that allow them to then pursue those who participate in these various forms of human trafficking; how do we encourage governments to enforce those laws and actually begin to hold people accountable; and lastly, how do we create the conditions where the victims or the potential victims of human trafficking

are able to come forward in a non-threatening way and help us understand better how this is occurring.

And it's really the results of what we do that matter. The report is an important tool to help us understand and help us help other governments understand, but the end of it – it's the individual, it's the victim, and our ability to prevent others from being victimized.

Human trafficking is as old as humankind. Regrettably, it's been with us for centuries and centuries. But in the expression of this act, as I read that one line to you, it is our hope that the 21st century will be the last century of human trafficking, and that's what we are all committed to. Regrettably – (applause).

Regrettably, our challenge is enormous. Today, globally, it's estimated that there are 20 million victims of human trafficking. So, clearly, we have a lot of work to do and governments around the world have a lot of work to do.

So let me now make a few comments on the report and why it's so important. Obviously, the consequences of our failure to act in this area has so many other negative impacts around the world: it breeds corruption; it undermines rule of law; it erodes the core values that underpin a civil society. Transnational criminal networks also – whether they be drug dealers, money launderers, or document forgers – are partly enabled by participating in human trafficking activities as well.

When state actors or nonstate actors use human trafficking, it can become a threat to our national security.

North Korea, for instance, depends on forced labor to generate illicit sources of revenue in industries including construction, mining, and food processing. An estimated fifty to eighty thousand North Korean citizens are working overseas as forced laborers, primarily in Russia and China, many of them working 20 hours a day. Their pay does not come to them directly. It goes to the Government of Korea, which confiscates most of that, obviously.

The North Korean regime receives hundreds of millions of dollars per year from the fruits of forced labor. Responsible nations simply cannot allow this to go on, and we continue to call on any nation that is hosting workers from North Korea in a forced labor arrangement to send those people home. Responsible nations also must take further action. China was downgraded to Tier Three status in this year's report in part because it has not taken serious steps to end its own complicity in trafficking – including forced laborers from North Korea that are located in China.

American consumers and businesses must also recognize they may have an unwitting connection to human trafficking. Supply chains creating many products that Americans enjoy may be utilizing forced labor. The State Department does engage with businesses to alert them to these situations so that they can take actions on their own to ensure that they are not in any way complicit.

Most tragically, human trafficking preys on the most vulnerable, young children, boys and girls, separating them from their families, often to be exploited, forced into prostitution or sex slavery.

The State Department's 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report exposes human trafficking networks and holds their operators and their accomplices accountable.

The focus of this year's report is governments' responsibilities under the Palermo Protocol to criminalize human trafficking in all its forms and to prosecute offenders. We urge the 17 countries that are not a party to the international Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons to reconsider their position and to join the other countries who have made that commitment.

The 2017 TIP Report also emphasizes governments must put forward tougher anti-corruption laws and enforce them, so that traffickers do not get a free pass for those who choose to turn a blind eye.

Importantly, nations must educate law enforcement partners on how to identify and respond to those who dishonorably wear the law enforcement uniform or the military uniform by allowing trafficking to flourish. The most devastating examples are police officers and those who we rely upon to protect us, that they become complicit through bribery, by actually working in brothels themselves, or obstructing investigations for their own profit. Complicity and corruption that allows human trafficking from law enforcement officials must end.

We know shutting down these networks is challenging. But these challenges cannot serve as an excuse for inaction.

The 2017 TIP Report also recognizes those governments making progress. We want to give them credit for what they are doing. Last year, governments reported more than 9,000 convictions of human-trafficking crimes worldwide, up from past years.

Just to mention a few highlights:

Last July, the president of Afghanistan ordered an investigation into institutionalized sexual abuse of children by police officers, including punishment for perpetrators. In January, a new law was enacted criminalizing bacha baazi, a practice that exploits boys for social and sexual entertainment. The government continues to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers – including complicit government officials.

In the Ukraine – a country that has been on the Watch List for years – the office of the prosecutor general issued directives to improve investigations of trafficking, and increased efforts to root out complicity, including convictions of police officers. A teacher at a government-run school, a government-run boarding school for orphans, has been arrested for trying to sell a child. And officials are now on notice that complicity in trafficking will be met with strict punishment.

In the Philippines, increased efforts to combat trafficking have led to the investigation of more than 500 trafficking cases and the arrest of 272 suspects – an 80 percent increase from 2015.

Given the scale of the problem, though, all of these countries, and many more, have much to do. But it is important to note their progress and encourage their continued commitment.

As with other forms of illicit crime, human trafficking is becoming more nuanced and more difficult to identify. Much of these activities are going underground and they're going online.

The State Department is committed to continuing to develop with other U.S. agencies, as well as our partners abroad, new approaches to follow these activities wherever they go and to train law enforcement to help them improve their technologies to investigate and prosecute these crimes.

To that end, I am pleased to highlight a State Department initiative announced earlier this year.

The Program to End Modern Slavery will increase funding for prosecution, protection, and prevention efforts to reduce the occurrence of modern slavery wherever it is most prevalent. The program is the result of the important support of Congress, especially from Chairman Corker, and other leaders committed to bringing more people out from under what is a crime against basic human rights.

The Program to End Modern Slavery will fund transformational programs but also set about to raise commitments of \$1.5 billion in support from other governments and private donors, while developing the capacity of foreign governments and civil society to work to end modern slavery in their own countries.

As we reflect on this year's reports and the state of human trafficking the world over, we recognize those dedicated individuals who have committed their lives – and in some cases put their lives at risk – in pursuit of ending modern slavery. For many victims, theirs is the first face of hope they see after weeks or even years of fear and pain.

The 2017 TIP Report Heroes will be recognized formally in just a few minutes, but I want to thank them and express my own admiration for their courage, leadership, sacrifice, and devotion to ending human trafficking. (Applause.)

As we honor these heroes, we remember that everyone – everyone – has a role to play. Governments, NGOs, the private sector, survivors, and, most of all, the American people all must continue to work together to make human trafficking end in the 21st century.

And now please join me in welcoming an advocate for ending human trafficking, and someone who is doing a great deal to raise the profile of this issue, Advisor to the President of the United States, Ms. Ivanka Trump. (Applause.)

MS TRUMP: Thank you, Secretary Tillerson, for the warm welcome and for

representing the United States with such incredible distinction. It is an honor to join you, Ambassador Coppedge, and the entire State Department team here today, who works tirelessly to remove the ugly stain on civilization that is human trafficking. We are grateful for your continued dedication. Also here with us is Senator Corker. Senator, I want to thank you for your unwavering commitment to this critical issue. (Applause.)

It is an honor to be here today at the release of this year's Trafficking in Persons Report and to recognize this year's heroes. Their remarkable work inspires action. Thank you for affording us the opportunity to learn from your impressive examples.

Human trafficking is a pervasive human rights issue affecting millions, no matter their gender, age, or nationality. It is often a profoundly secret crime. One of the greatest challenges is to merely identify those trapped in modern slavery. Even conservative estimates conclude that some 20 million people around the world, including right here in the United States, are trapped in human trafficking situations, terrible circumstances of exploitation, including so many young girls and boys who are victims of unthinkable tragedy of child sex trafficking.

The stories of those we honor today demonstrate why combating this crime here in the United States, as well as around the globe, is in both our moral and our strategic interest. As Secretary Tillerson noted earlier, ending human trafficking is a major foreign policy priority for the Trump administration. Over the past several months, the White House has hosted round tables and listening sessions with victims, with NGOs, members of Congress, and others to determine steps we can take to better execute a strategy to finally end human trafficking. The President signed an executive order designed to strengthen the enforcement of federal law with regards to transnational criminal organizations, including traffickers. Further, he has taken steps to ensure that the Department of Homeland Security personnel are properly trained to combat child trafficking at points of entry into the United States.

This year's report emphasizes the responsibility all governments have to prosecute human traffickers. It also provides an opportunity for countries to see how others are fighting human trafficking and to adopt the most effective strategies and tactics, while renewing their own resolve in this struggle.

On a personal level, as a mother, this is much more than a policy priority. It is a clarion call to action in defense of the vulnerable, the abused, and the exploited. Last month, while in Rome, I had an opportunity to talk firsthand with human trafficking survivors. They told me their harrowing stories, how they were trapped in this ugly, dark web, how they survived, how they escaped, and how they are very slowly reconstructing their lives.

Here in the United States, we have our own Advisory Council on Human Trafficking, comprised exclusively of survivors. We cannot meaningfully address this pervasive issue without the brave voice of survivors at the table. They can help us understand what they experienced and they will play a leading role in solving this pressing crisis.

These survivors are not only victims; they are heroes. So are the courageous crusaders who have committed themselves to fight human trafficking wherever it exists. As part of the 2017 TIP Report, the State Department recognizes individuals who have been tireless in their efforts to combat human trafficking. Today, we honor a police officer, whose efforts led to the identification of 350 children forced into labor; a union leader, who protects workers in the fishing industry; a judge, who played a critical role in drafting her country's first anti-trafficking legislation; a journalist, who shines a light on forced labor; a faith leader, who works to protect vulnerable migrants; a sociologist, whose groundbreaking research considers the structural challenges affecting vulnerable populations; an advocate, who founded an NGO to care for child sex trafficking victims; and a survivor, the first in her country to win civil damages in a sex trafficking case. Each of these heroes is a source of inspiration. They all have different backgrounds but are united in this shared cause. We celebrate and we stand with each of you. (Applause.)

So as we mark the release of this year's report, let us remember the victims saved from the unimaginable horrors of human trafficking. Let us recommit ourselves to finding those still in the shadows of exploitation. And let us celebrate the heroes who continue to shine a light on the darkness of human trafficking.

Now please join me in welcoming the great Ambassador Susan Coppedge, as she reads the citations. Thank you for your incredible work. (Applause.)

AMBASSADOR COPPEDGE: Thank you, Mrs. Trump, for those heartfelt words. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the White House. I would like to ask each TIP Report hero to stand up when I call out his or her name and country and join us to receive their award.

First, from Argentina, Alika Kinan. (Applause.) In recognition of her extraordinary courage in pursuing justice against her traffickers, her selfless efforts to assist the government in prosecuting and preventing human trafficking cases by sharing her experiences and knowledge, and her tenacity in advocating for greater protections for vulnerable groups and victims of trafficking in Argentina. They wouldn't let me read, they were clapping too loud, so – (laughter) – thank you.

Next, from Brazil, Leonardo Sakamoto. (Applause.) In recognition of his unwavering resolve to find and expose instances of forced labor, his commitment to raising awareness among vulnerable communities and within the private sector, and his vital role in ensuring progress in government efforts to prevent human trafficking in Brazil. (Applause.)

And Sister Vanaja Jasphine from Cameroon. (Applause.) In recognition of her unrelenting efforts to combat modern slavery, her groundbreaking work in identifying a key migration trend to prevent trafficking of Cameroonians in the Middle East, and her dedication to ensuring survivors have legal support and access to comprehensive reintegration assistance. (Applause.)

And from Hungary, Viktoria Sebhelyi. (Applause.) In recognition of her

groundbreaking academic contributions to reveal the prevalence of child sex trafficking in Hungary, her ability to bring together government and civil society organizations to improve victim identification and services, and her dedication to increasing awareness and understanding of human trafficking. (Applause.)

From Morocco, Judge Amina Oufroukhi. (Applause.) In recognition of her leadership as a driving force behind Morocco's comprehensive new anti-trafficking law, her perseverance in developing a victim-centered implementation plan, and her steadfast commitment to training judicial and law enforcement officials likely to come into contact with victims of human trafficking. (Applause.)

And from Taiwan, Allison Lee. (Applause.) In recognition of her unwavering advocacy on behalf of foreign fishermen on Taiwan-flagged vessels, her central role in forming the first labor union composed of and led by foreign workers, and her courage in demanding stronger protections for vulnerable workers through sustained engagement with authorities and the public. (Applause.)

And from Thailand, Boom Mosby. (Applause.) In recognition of her steadfast commitment to combat child sex trafficking in Thailand, her dedication to enhancing comprehensive care for victims, and her persistent engagement with government officials, social workers, and service providers to further protect and reintegrate survivors of human trafficking back into their communities. (Applause.)

And from India, Mr. Mahesh Muralidhar Bhagwat. We are sorry that Mr. Bhagwat was unable to join us today, but would like to recognize him for his dynamic leadership in combatting modern slavery in India, his vital role in elevating human trafficking as a government priority, and his innovative approach to investigating cases and dismantling trafficking operations. (Applause.)

Now, I am pleased to introduce TIP Report hero, Boom Mosby, the founder and director of the HUG Project in Thailand. Ms. Mosby is a passionate advocate for child victims of sexual abuse in Thailand, and has been instrumental in the advancement of a victim-centered approach in Thai anti-trafficking efforts. (Applause.)

MS MOSBY: Thank you. Secretary Tillerson, it is a great honor to be standing here today on behalf of a 2017 TIP Hero and especially on behalf of human trafficking's – human – human trafficking victims around the world. (Applause.)

I would like to tell you about one of those victims: a girl I will call Jane. She was the first trafficking victim I worked with. Six years ago, Jane was exploited in sex trafficking when she was only 13 years old. Like millions of other men, women, and children around the world, she found herself trapped in the darkness of modern day slavery through manipulation and false promises. Jane's traffickers used the seduction of money to lure her into their control. In hindsight, Jane would say that she took a wrong turn and made mistake, but the truth is she is a victim.

No matter how much recovery Jane experiences, the physical and emotional scars will mark her for a lifetime. That is why human trafficking, whether for labor or for sex, is not only a crime against an individual; it is a crime against human dignity. But thanks to the devoted people like the heroes in this room, freedom is possible. Jane will tell you that the key ingredients to her recovery have been patience and unconditional love. What she needs from us is to stand with her at her worst. Today, Jane is about to finish high school and is determined to continue her education in social work and make a difference in the lives of other victims like her.

Success story like Jane's could not happen without collaboration. One example of this is the Thailand Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force. TICAC represents a new model of cooperation between law enforcement and NGOs. We are putting aside personal agendas and bringing together dedicated and passionate individuals to accomplish our common goals. Our focus is on a victim-centered approach: always asking what is in the best interest of the child. The victim is always our highest priority.

Today, we are receiving the title of hero, but in fact, we do not possess any supernatural powers. (Laughter.) We are here because of the hard work and team work of many heroes. In the end, when facing the evil of human trafficking, we are all confronted with a choice: Do nothing or do something.

When looking at this choice, I am reminded of our past king, the late His Majesty King Rama IX, who died less than a year ago. As Thailand's long-reigning monarch, he was often referred to as the "father of our nation." He truly looked at the Thai people as his children, having compassion for their suffering and working hard to improve their lives. Today, I call upon the government, leadership, and ordinary citizens of every country to follow the late Thai king's example and look after their people as their children.

Thank you. (Applause.)

AMBASSADOR COPPEDGE: Thank you, Ms. Mosby. We are so grateful for the work that you do, and we're truly inspired by all of our heroes here today. I also want to thank our colleagues in the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs for sponsoring the heroes' visit to the United States. After they leave here today, the heroes will be traveling to Boston and Miami to meet with anti-trafficking organizations, exchange ideas, and share promising practices.

I have spent my career working on this issue. First, as a federal prosecutor, and now, leading the TIP office in the Department of State. In both roles, I have witnessed the aftermath of human cruelty and greed really at its very worst – individuals, both children and adults, forced into unimaginable suffering. And yet I always say to work in this field you have to have hope, and I have hope – hope that is inspired by the incredible people I have met along the way: survivors, NGO leaders, dedicated law enforcement and government officials, experts and everyday community members who refuse to let this issue be ignored. The fight against human trafficking is a struggle that unites us all, and with determination, optimism, and collaboration, we can end modern slavery.

In her remarks, Ms. Mosby noted that we are all confronted with a choice: Do nothing or do something. Everyone in this room who is working in this arena and those around the world who are fighting trafficking are doing something. But to the rest of the world, I echo Ms. Mosby's call to action. When it comes to human trafficking, everyone has a role to play and an obligation to act. We must choose to do something to end modern slavery.

Thank you all so much for coming today. (Applause.)

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