



COUNTER TRAFFICKING NETWORK JOINT STATEMENT TO MARK VIET NAM'S NATIONAL DAY AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Trafficking in persons is a heinous crime affecting millions of people. According to the International Labour Organization, almost 21 million people worldwide are estimated to be victims of forced labour, a practice that generates US \$150 billion in illegal profits annually. Every year 1.2 million children are trafficked worldwide and the trafficking of women and children within and from South East Asia accounts for one third of global trafficking numbers. However, only tens of thousands of victims of trafficking are detected and reported every year (source: UNODC 2016). The actual numbers of people trafficked or subjected to forced labour and slavery is likely to be much higher than reported estimates.

Trafficked persons can be forced into sexual exploitation, bonded labour, domestic servitude, and marriage. In recent years, the number of reported incidences of Vietnamese women and children being trafficked internally and across borders has risen. Although some manage to escape their circumstances, far too many do not.

In 2016, the Government of Viet Nam selected 30 July as the National Day against Trafficking in Persons. This day coincides with the United Nations World Day against Trafficking in Persons that was established to raise awareness of the plight of trafficked victims, and to promote and protect their rights. 2017 is the second year Viet Nam marks a National Day against Trafficking in Persons and this year's theme is raising awareness of the **risks of trafficking in persons through migration for marriage**.

The Counter Trafficking (CT) Network in Viet Nam, which includes representatives from Government ministries, United Nations agencies, Embassies, non-governmental organizations, and civil society, are deeply concerned by the increasing numbers of Vietnamese women trafficked abroad through forced marriage and subjection to deplorable abuse and labour exploitation.

Young women and girls who are poor and have limited access to information are particularly at risk of this form of trafficking. To meet the demand for wives in foreign countries, traffickers prey upon girls and young women, often in remote, rural areas across the nation, and deceive them with promises of large houses and the opportunity to work for higher incomes. After being kidnapped or tricked into crossing neighbouring borders, these women and girls are then sold into forced sex work, or forced into marriages involving labour exploitation and other abuse. Human traffickers can be known to the victim and often include family or community members, or are members of larger, complex transnational criminal rings who flaunt their wealth to trick the vulnerable victim into trusting them. Traffickers stand to gain huge profits from the suffering of their victims.

Viet Nam's Counter Trafficking Network members work tirelessly to decrease the risk of people falling victim to this form of trafficking. The Counter Trafficking Network is committed to cooperating in efforts to capture and prosecute human traffickers, and in assisting in the repatriation and resettlement of survivors. Despite efforts, Counter Trafficking Network members continue to receive an alarming number of requests for assistance from survivors of human trafficking.

The Counter Trafficking Network commends the Government of Viet Nam for raising awareness of this appalling practice and supports Government efforts to combat this form of trafficking that preys on some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

Over recent years, Viet Nam has made concerted efforts to combat trafficking in persons and to protect victims. Viet Nam has developed a strengthened legal framework on combatting trafficking in persons; approved a revised Penal Code with provisions criminalizing trafficking in persons which move closer to reflecting agreed international definitions; approved and implemented three National Plans of Action on combating trafficking in persons; signed and implemented a number of bilateral agreements on combating trafficking in persons with regional neighbours; engaged in the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking; and ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. Recently, Viet Nam also ratified the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons.

However, despite such strong effort and commitment from the Government, the crime of trafficking in persons in Viet Nam is becoming increasingly complex, with traffickers employing modern information technology to trick victims and subvert law enforcement. More work still needs to be done to combat trafficking in persons, to protect victims and assist survivors. Joint efforts will bring better results.

The Counter Trafficking Network takes this opportunity to offer for the Government's consideration recommendations to further prevent trafficking in persons and to promote the protection of victims:

- I. Improve data collection and increase the availability of statistics on this illegal activity, in order to support identification of the determining factors that lead to risks of exploitation, and to improve victim referral mechanisms and protection services;
- II. Undertake a national comprehensive study on trafficking in persons, with a focus on trafficking for the purpose of forced labour, that can guide interventions;
- III. Continue legal reforms to ensure that all forms of trafficking in persons are criminalized according to international standards
- IV. Continue to strengthen governance and active monitoring of labour recruitment to prevent unscrupulous recruitment practices, and consider regulations prohibiting the imposition of recruitment fees;
- V. Continue to strengthen the capacity of government officials and relevant authorities to combat trafficking in persons and raise awareness of this issue, especially at the grass-roots level, including schools;
- VI. Implement policies to identify and assist victims amongst vulnerable groups;
- VII. Expand assistance for victims, including those who escape and return home of their own volition, and reform procedures for victims to receive financial assistance and vocational training;

- VIII. Expand and strengthen actions for combatting internal trafficking including investigation and identification;
- IX. Ensure that all proceeds and assets derived from trafficking in persons are seized and confiscated in order to fund recovery and reintegration programs, including compensation for victims; and
- X. Strengthen international cooperation in key areas, to effectively investigate and prosecute perpetrators and criminal networks.

The Counter Trafficking Network also takes this valuable opportunity to emphasize the need to ensure the protection of the rights of victims of trafficking, regardless of their age, sex or legal status.

- We recommend the Government of Viet Nam amend its legislation to define children as any person under 18 years, for consistency with international standards.
- Victims must not be detained, nor subjected to administrative or criminal liability, for their involvement in unlawful activities when their involvement is a consequence of being trafficked.
- Protection and support services should be tailored to meet the particular needs of trafficked victims, including physical protection, psychological support, legal advice, privacy safeguards, family tracing and reunion, alternative care, and reintegration services.

This joint statement from the Counter Trafficking Network reflects our unified commitment to raise awareness on the important issue of trafficking in persons and to work cooperatively to improve counter trafficking policies and programmes in Viet Nam. The Counter Trafficking Network stands ready to provide technical assistance to government agencies to fully reflect Viet Nam's international commitments to prevent trafficking in persons and to protect victims of trafficking in Viet Nam.