



Alliance to End Slavery and
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U.S. State Department Holds Burma, Uzbekistan Accountable for Human Trafficking

Thailand upgrade unjustified; failure to right 2015's mistake on Malaysia damages credibility

Washington, D.C.—The Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST) applauded Secretary of State John F. Kerry's decision to downgrade Burma and Uzbekistan in the State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, released today, in light of the countries' failure to meaningfully address human trafficking. The coalition also expressed disappointment that in the latest report the State Department failed to fix last year's politically motivated upgrade of Malaysia and unjustifiably upgraded Thailand.

The TIP Report ranks governments worldwide, including the United States, into one of three tiers based on their efforts to combat and prevent human trafficking, forced labor and other forms of modern slavery. Countries have improved their efforts to fight human trafficking to avoid the lowest ranking of Tier 3 and accompanying sanctions.

"The TIP report should provide an honest assessment of human trafficking and forced labor in each country. After last year's politically motivated rankings, we were watching this year's TIP report closely and we are glad that the State Department got it right with several key downgrades," said Kristen Abrams, Acting Director of ATEST. "Burma's downgrade is an honest reflection of its lack of progress in addressing human trafficking and we are pleased this reality was not outweighed by other political considerations with the newly-democratic country. We are equally encouraged by the State Department's decision to downgrade Uzbekistan: no country that engages in state-orchestrated forced labor should be placed anywhere but on Tier 3."

Despite moving in the right direction on Uzbekistan and Burma, ATEST is concerned by the State Department's decisions to move Thailand to the Tier 2 Watch List and to maintain Malaysia's Tier 2 status over objections from the anti-trafficking community.

"Thailand's lack of policy implementation and meaningful change on the ground calls for the lowest Tier 3 ranking. We are concerned that the State Department let Thailand's vague policies and promises influence this year's ranking," said Abrams.

"Malaysia's upgrade last year was unjustified then and placement on the Tier 2 Watch List remains unjustified today. More than a year after the discovery of mass graves of trafficking victims along the Malaysia-Thailand border, there is little evidence that Malaysia has taken anything more than meager steps to address its troublesome human trafficking situation," said Abrams.

The United States received a top Tier 1 ranking for the seventh consecutive year. Last year, Congress closed an 85-year-old trade loophole that allowed goods made from slave labor to be imported into the United States. Despite the top ranking, more work is needed to combat human trafficking at home. Efforts to pass legislation to protect vulnerable runaway and homeless youth

from trafficking have stalled in Congress, while funding to meet the scale of human trafficking in the U.S. remains far short of the need.

"President Obama has made significant efforts to combat human trafficking and forced labor over the past eight years but his legacy on modern slavery may be overshadowed by the politicization of last year's TIP report and failure to make a strong course correction this year," said Abrams. "To prevent this from happening in the future, Congress should intervene and ensure that the State Department bases its rankings of countries' anti-trafficking efforts on credible evidence, not politics."

Several ATEST members weighed in on the release of the 2016 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report:

"Over the years, the TIP report has been a key tool in highlighting how exploitative labor conditions faced by many domestic workers, in the US and around the world, can lead to human trafficking. The report also amplifies the voices of survivors who inspire us all to find solutions to end human trafficking. Maintaining the integrity of the TIP report by ensuring its assessments do not fall prey to political considerations, is crucial for domestic workers in holding their governments accountable and meaningfully preventing human trafficking," stated Sameera Hafiz, advocacy director of the **National Domestic Workers Alliance**. "Additionally, the State Department today released additional tools to prevent the human trafficking of domestic workers around the world. These tools can help assist governments in understanding the important role they play in protecting the rights of workers and help ensure domestic workers can provide essential care for homes and families in dignified and fair working conditions," continued Hafiz.

Sarah Jakiel, Chief Programs Officer at **Polaris**: "The Trafficking in Persons report not only serves as a reminder of how far the international community has progressed in combating modern slavery around the world, but also how much work remains. Human trafficking is too often ignored, unchecked, or not responded to at the scale required to effectively prevent this crime from happening in the first place. The TIP report can only be effective if the US Government truly prioritizes peoples' right to live in freedom over trade relations."

"We are very disheartened to see that the US State Department has upgraded Thailand, one of the most prolific purveyors of unabated modern slavery," said **CAST** Policy Director, Stephanie Richard. As one of the Southern California's leading organization's serving survivors of human trafficking, CAST sees firsthand the dispiriting and dehumanizing effects of this crime against humanity.

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The **Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking** is a U.S.-based coalition that advocates for solutions to prevent and end all forms of human trafficking and modern slavery around the world. ATEST member organizations include: Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST), Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), ECPAT-USA, Free the Slaves, Futures Without Violence (FUTURES), International Justice Mission, National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), National Network for Youth (NN4Y), Polaris, Safe Horizon, Solidarity Center, Verité, and Vital Voices Global Partnership. ATEST is a project of Humanity United. www.EndSlaveryandTrafficking.org