

Press Releases: Remarks at the 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report Launch Ceremony

Remarks

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Dean Acheson Auditorium

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MS JOHNSTONE: Hello, and welcome to the Department of State. My name is Kari Johnstone and I'm the acting director for the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons.

Thank you all for joining us today to mark the release of the 18th annual Trafficking in Persons or TIP Report. It is an honor to be here today with Secretary Pompeo and Advisor to the President Ivanka Trump. We thank you both very much for elevating the issue of human trafficking and for your support for our office.

A quick word about today's program. First, Secretary Pompeo will give keynote remarks. Following that, Secretary Pompeo and Ms. Trump will honor our 10 remarkable TIP report heroes and we will hear brief remarks from one of them. After the event concludes, I will invite you to pick up a copy of the report at the back of the auditorium. And now, ladies and gentlemen, Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo. (Applause.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: Welcome, everyone to the State Department. We are incredibly proud to be hosting this event today.

I want to thank Ivanka Trump for joining us at this event for the second year in a row now. Your personal engagement with this issue matters an awful lot. It illustrates the administration's complete commitment to and the priority we place on human trafficking both at home and abroad, so thank you very much for being with us today. Your advocacy matters, and we'll talk about that today.

I'm also honored to have Senator Corker. I saw Representative Smith and Representative Donovan. Thank you all for being here and joining us today as well. We know that putting an end to human trafficking is a bipartisan objective. It supersedes any politics here in the United States. Our commitment to fighting and ending this together is incredibly strong.

I also want to welcome all the ambassadors and representatives from the foreign diplomatic corps present here today. You're important partners here for this issue as well.

And none of this happens just with the work of the State Department. We are grateful for the many federal agencies, individuals, nongovernmental organizations, and international organizations who continue to help us better understand the many manifestations of human trafficking and the most effective ways to combat it.

Finally, we're thankful for the work of the United States Advisory Council on Human Trafficking. This March, President Trump appointed nine members to this advisory council. Each member is a survivor of human trafficking, representing many different backgrounds, experiences, and it advises the Trump administration on federal anti-trafficking policies and programs.

The council also serves as a model, one that we hope other governments will consider creating as well. It gives survivors a meaningful seat at the table to help guide the creation of anti-trafficking policies and ensure governments adopt a victim-centered approach to resolving this.

And today we also have the incredible, extraordinary opportunity to honor 10 individuals who have committed their lives to this effort and often have put their own lives at risk in doing so. The 2018 TIP Report Heroes will be recognized formally in a few minutes, but I wanted to personally thank them and express my admiration for the tremendous, awe-inspiring work that each of you do. To this year's heroes, we salute you. (Applause.)

Every year our report focuses on a specific thing. This year's TIP Report highlights the critical work of local communities to stop traffickers and provide support to victims. Human trafficking is a global problem, but it's a local one too. Human trafficking can be found in a favorite restaurant, a hotel, downtown, a farm, or in their neighbor's home.

I can speak to this personally. When I was a member of Congress from south central Kansas, frankly, under the tutelage of now-Ambassador, then-Governor Brownback, we saw the impact of human trafficking in a place like Wichita, Kansas. I-35 passes through the city to the south, and we saw the impact it had on our community, but more importantly, on the persons being trafficked through our community. It has been important to me since then, and I'm proud to be here today to present this report.

If we're going to win this fight, national governments must empower local communities to proactively identify human trafficking and develop local solutions to address it.

As we have every year, the report also points out which countries are improving efforts – their efforts to tackle the crime and which countries are making it easier to carry it out. I'm glad to say we have several good news – progress to report.

In Estonia, the government implemented a new law that will help victims come forward and get the support that the victims need to recover.

The Government of Argentina convicted officials complicit in trafficking crimes, established additional legal protection for victims, and bolstered efforts to train frontline responders.

In Bahrain, the government worked to hold local traffickers criminally accountable and developed a mechanism to get victims needed shelter.

The Government of Cyprus bolstered efforts to convict traffickers and improve protections for victims as well.

We saw some positive movements across entire regions as well. Of the 48 African countries included in the report, 14 received upgrades – meaning we observed a strong trend of increased efforts to improve their overall response. Despite significant security threats, migration challenges, other financial constraints, and other obstacles, the region improved

significantly.

We commend those countries taking action, but we also will never shy away from pointing out countries that need to step up.

We read the horrific accounts of human trafficking and abuse of African migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers in Libya, resulting in modern-day slave markets. We've engaged the Libyan Government of National Accord to bring the perpetrators to justice, including complicit government officials. We welcome its commitment to doing so and look forward to seeing real action.

In Southeast Asia, Burma's armed forces and others in the Rakhine State dislocated hundreds of thousands of Rohingya and members of other ethnic groups, many of whom were exploited through the region as a result. Some in the Burmese military also recruited child soldiers and subjected adults and children from ethnic minority groups to forced labor.

We see the tragic examples of forced labor in North Korea as well. Untold number of North Korean citizens are subjected to forced labor overseas by their own government, in many cases with the tacit approval of host governments.

And in Iran, trafficking victims are punished – the victims are punished – for acts they are forced to commit. For example, sex trafficking victims may face the death penalty for committing adultery. This is a horrible perversion of justice by a corrupt regime.

We take these stories to heart. We use them as fuel to motivate us to action as we work together to end human trafficking once and for all.

You'll see from today's report that there remains a great deal of work left to do. The world should know that we will not stop until human trafficking is a thing of the past.

Before I conclude, I'd like to thank Acting Director Johnstone for leading the TIP Office over the last year. Thank you, Kari. Thank you for your dedicated and talented staff at the TIP Office. Your long hours and hard work have produced a report that will not go unnoticed. It's a team and department-wide effort. Thank you to you and your team. (Applause.)

With that, please join me in welcoming Advisor to the President Ms. Ivanka Trump as we present awards to the 2018 TIP Heroes. (Applause.)

MS JOHNSTONE: Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for your meaningful words and for using your voice for this important issue. And now we will ask each TIP Report Hero to stand up when I call out their name and country and join us to receive their award.

Mr. Ausamah AlAbsi from Bahrain. (Applause.) In recognition of his perseverance in advocating for victim-centered policies within the government by establishing one of the region's top shelters for trafficking victims, launching the government's new national referral mechanism for trafficking victims, and spearheading efforts to reduce the vulnerability of foreign

workers by reforming the government sponsorship system.

And next, Mr. Josue Ango from Burkina Faso. (Applause.) In recognition of his exceptional commitment to fighting human trafficking throughout his career, his key role in building Burkina Faso's comprehensive and multinational anti-trafficking network, and his invaluable contributions to strengthening the governance response to combating child labor and supporting youth who are vulnerable to human trafficking. (Applause.)

Francisca Awah Mbuli from Cameroon. (Applause.) In recognition of her unwavering resolve to prevent forced labor within vulnerable communities in Cameroon, her commitment to raising awareness throughout the country and around the world in partnership with media outlets and international organizations, and her innovative programs to economically empower women who are survivors of human trafficking. (Applause.)

Yanira Violeta Olivares Pineda from El Salvador. (Applause.) In recognition of her dynamic leadership in combating modern slavery as the head of El Salvador's specialized trafficking in persons unit, her success in prosecuting traffickers and dismantling their domestic and international criminal operations despite limited resources, and her vital role in elevating anti-trafficking efforts as a government priority. (Applause.)

Maizidah Salas from Indonesia. (Applause.) In recognition of her unwavering efforts to empower Indonesian migrant workers through skills training, public awareness, and family assistance. Her central role in forming the first migrant worker community in Indonesia and her courage in demanding stronger protections for vulnerable workers and trafficking survivors through sustained engagement with authorities and the public. (Applause.)

Sunita Danuwar, from Nepal. (Applause.) In recognition of her exceptional leadership in founding the first comprehensive victim services organization in Nepal, established and run by survivors of trafficking; her persistent community outreach and engagement with vulnerable communities to prevent human trafficking; and her unrivaled commitment to protect and empower survivors. (Applause.)

Blessing Okoedion, from Nigeria. (Applause.) In recognition of her extraordinary courage and using her lived experiences to spread awareness about and prevent human trafficking, her selfless efforts to assist survivors and lend a helping hand to those still subjected to the crime, and her unwavering advocacy for greater protections for vulnerable groups and victims of trafficking across Italy and Nigeria. (Applause.)

Ivana Radovic, from Serbia. (Applause.) In recognition of her pivotal role in driving the work of one of Serbia's premier anti-trafficking organizations, her persistent advocacy efforts for trafficking victims, and her unparalleled contributions to strengthening Serbia's anti-trafficking response by building the capacity of government and private sector institutions. (Applause.)

Kim Jong-chul, from South Korea. (Applause.) In recognition of his commitment to expose forced labor conditions and practices through his groundbreaking

investigative research on human trafficking in South Korea and globally, particularly of migrant fishermen on South Korean flagged vessels, and his tireless work in fighting for the rights of vulnerable groups and human trafficking victims. (Applause.)

Dr. Yosief Abrham Mehari, from Sudan. (Applause.) In recognition of his selfless service as a medical doctor and advocate to provide critical assistance to trafficking victims, his unparalleled generosity in dedicating his time and resources to ensure survivors receive quality medical care and support, and his collaboration with Sudanese authorities to connect victims of human trafficking with services to help them successfully rebuild their lives. (Applause.)

And now, I am pleased to introduce TIP Report Hero Francisca Awah Mbuli, a survivor of human trafficking and the founding director of Survivors' Network in Cameroon. (Applause.) As a survivor of domestic servitude, Ms. Awah Mbuli uses her experience and creativity to raise awareness among communities throughout Cameroon and advocate for better services for trafficking victims. Her organization has built a unique approach to survivor empowerment by focusing on economic independence and fostering entrepreneurship among women and girls. We are honored to have her here with us today to speak on behalf of this year's Trafficking in Persons Report Heroes.

MS AWAH MBULI: Dear Secretary of State Pompeo and distinguished guests, on behalf of all survivors and TIP Heroes, the recognition you bestow on us is an honor. Thank you, sir. (Applause.)

The TIP Office is recognized internationally for its leadership in ending the atrocity of slavery. Your highlighting our effort to end human trafficking bolsters our credibility internationally and puts us in a network of freedom fighters around the world.

A few years ago, I could have only dreamt of such an honor. Three years ago, I accepted a job offer to teach English in the Gulf Cooperation Council. This was after returning home from Norway, where I was pursuing a master's degree in human rights and multiculturalism but couldn't afford to live there.

When I arrived the Gulf Cooperation Council, there wasn't a job teaching English. I was trafficked into slavery as a domestic worker, where I didn't earn anything but inhuman treatment and sexual abuses. When I said that I wanted to go home, they told me that I had a debt of \$3,000 U.S. dollars which I had to pay, and then pay my flight back home. This was a lie.

However, I considered selling a kidney to pay the \$3,000 U.S. dollars and get out. Other girls were in such desperate situations that they went into brothels. Some were never heard from again. All of the women I met on my way to the Gulf Cooperation Council had been promised jobs with higher pay than we could have ever received in our home country. None had received a job or pay they were promised.

All of us left our homes so that we could find a way to support our families. In many cases we were the hope of our families, the one who was put through

college. With the help of an NGO, I was able to escape my captors and return home. Then we helped 27 other women return home. Many others were not as lucky.

There are limited resources available through international aid. That is why I made it my mission and my organization, Survivors' Network's mission, to build a grassroot movement in Africa to create an awareness program to prevent human trafficking. My sisters and brothers need to learn the signs of false work promises. To prevent trafficking, people need vocational training to build skills so that they can work and become self-sufficient in their home countries.

Microfinance can help those who have skills start businesses, however even more than that is necessary. There is need to be social and economic empowerment education so that men cannot control women's futures. Perhaps a great example of one way that anti-trafficking organizations have historically impacted many women's self-sufficiency.

When it comes to communities, awareness campaigns about human trafficking and modern-day slavery can help to educate and protect people of all ages. Grassroot activities in towns, schools, churches, bus stops, radio and television stations, on the internet and social media, all contribute to awareness and increase the possibility that a bystander will intervene or an abuser will think twice.

This in no way diminishes the importance of rescuing and caring for the 25 million people who are currently enslaved. It is especially important that once victims are rescued they have a supportive network and infrastructure that they can lean on to prevent being re-trafficked.

Thank you for supporting me and my fellow TIP Report Heroes in our mission. This recognition means so much to all of us and revalidates our efforts and amplify our abilities to fight this terrible crime. Despite being named heroes, not just us but anyone can and should get involved in fighting human trafficking. We can all talk about this issue in our schools and workplaces and over dinner with our families. The more people who know and care, the more people we will save.

We are just beginning the anti-trafficking movement in Cameroon. But I know that together, we can end modern-day slavery.

Thank you. Thank you, everyone. (Applause.)

MS JOHNSTONE: Thank you, Francisca, for your inspiring remarks. We have a lot to learn from your journey. Your strength and perseverance go a long way toward ensuring that others can live a life filled with promise.

It is both an honor and a humbling experience to share this platform with so many human rights defenders who are undaunted in their search for freedom. I am thrilled that these heroes will have the opportunity to share their insights beyond the State Department halls when they meet with local leaders and organizations. Connecting leaders, experts, and activists from

communities around the world to exchange stories, promising practices, and lessons learned advances our global fight against human trafficking.

We believe so strongly in collaboration and partnership, especially at the state and local level, that we focused this year's TIP Report introduction around this theme. My team and I have learned that some of the most innovative ideas, strategies and solutions come from grassroots organizations, whether in the United States or abroad. We have seen again and again that individuals make the difference. Whether this is the Sacramento Uber driver who overheard a conversation between a teenage passenger and her traffickers and called the police, or the Chicago restaurant manager who noticed two employees with identical burns on their faces and encouraged them to contact the police, who charged their landlord with forced labor.

Last year, I was moved to see traditional leaders and elders in Ghana working with volunteers and social workers to develop a proactive community approach to combating human trafficking. The collective works of these individuals and others like them helped remove more than 180 children from forced labor, and it prevented numerous others from suffering such exploitation. Whether a good Samaritan, local leader or someone who's made anti-trafficking their life's work, individual actions matter.

At the State Department, we are committed to partnering with a broad range of stakeholders so that together, we may better prevent the crime from occurring, hold traffickers to account, and assist survivors of trafficking through a victim-centered and trauma-informed approach. Let us all draw inspiration from all of these heroes on the stage today, and from those doing what they can in their communities and around the world to fight trafficking. While the magnitude of the crime and myriad challenges may sometimes seem daunting, we must all roll up our sleeves and work together to break the bonds of modern slavery. Collectively, let us ensure that justice and freedom prevail.

Thank you all for coming today. Please remain in your seats until the Secretary, Ms. Trump and our heroes have left, and then I welcome you all to stay for a few minutes and mingle, and then exit out toward the back where you can pick up your own personal copy of the 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report. Thank you so much. (Applause.)

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