

# Press Releases: Senior State Department Official on the 2018 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report

Special Briefing  
Senior State Department Official  
Via Teleconference  
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**MODERATOR:** Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us for today's background call on the release of the 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report. We are joined today by [Senior State Department Official], who will be referred to as a Senior State Department Official. As a reminder, today's call is on background and will be embargoed until Secretary Pompeo begins his remarks at approximately 2 o'clock p.m. today.

With that, I'm happy to turn it over to our Senior State Department Official for some brief opening remarks, and then we'll open it up for questions.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Thank you very much, [Moderator], and thank you all for joining. It is my pleasure to speak with you today on the release of the 18th Annual Trafficking in Persons Report. The TIP Report is a culmination of a year of diplomatic engagement, research, and reporting by the TIP office, our regional bureaus, U.S. diplomatic missions around the world, and our interagency colleagues. The report is informed by foreign government officials, NGOs, faith groups, and international organizations, making this report a symbol of U.S. leadership in working collaboratively to combat human trafficking. The robust year-round effort we undertake shows both how important this issue is to U.S. Government and the American people as well as how much work remains in the fight against this devastating crime.

The report is our principal diagnostic tool to assess government efforts across what we call the three Ps of prosecuting traffickers, protecting and empowering victims, and preventing future trafficking crimes. Since it was first published in 2001, the report has proven effective in motivating tangible progress. It has prompted governments to enact legislation, establish national action plans, and implement anti-trafficking policies and programs.

The report currently provides country-specific narratives for 187 countries and territories, including the United States, and places them on one of four tiers, reflecting the extent to which the government meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, as required by the Trafficking

Victims Protection Act, or TVPA, the U.S. law that created the report. Tier 1 is for countries that are meeting the minimum standards. Tier 2 countries have not met the minimum standards but are making significant efforts to do so. Tier 2 Watch List is for countries that are making significant efforts but deserve closer scrutiny. Finally, Tier 3 is for countries that have not met the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so.

Under the TVPA, governments with a Tier 2 Watch List ranking can only retain that ranking for up to four consecutive years maximum. Any country ranked Tier 2 Watch List for four consecutive years is ineligible to stay on a Watch List and must be ranked Tier 3 if it does not meet the criteria to merit a ranking of Tier 2 or Tier 3.

Every year, many countries move between tiers. The 2018 report includes 29 upgrades and 20 downgrades. While combatting trafficking is difficult, the tier ranking system itself is fair. For example, take Antigua and Barbuda. It was on the Watch List for four consecutive years and faced an automatic downgrade this year. Despite the island of Barbuda being devastated by Hurricane Irene, the government, among all the other things it had to deal with, conducted its first ever anti-trafficking raid, developed a new victim referral system, created a new mechanism for police immigration coordination on trafficking, identified twice as many victims, and increased its investigations of trafficking crimes. The government earned an upgrade to Tier 2 this year, demonstrating that governments that prioritize the fight against trafficking can do a lot, even in extremely challenging circumstances.

Regardless of tier ranking, every government can and should do more to combat trafficking, which is why the TIP report offers concrete recommendations for improvements for every country in the book. The recommendations serve as a country-specific roadmap to better combat trafficking, to make real institutional change that can put more traffickers behind bars, better find and assist victims, and prevent exploitation of the vulnerable.

The theme of this year's report is "Local Solutions to a Global Problem: Supporting Communities in the Fight Against Human Trafficking." Local communities feel the impact and consequences of human trafficking most acutely. Their stake in keeping their community safe and their familiarity with local trafficking trends make them powerful and necessary forces in the fight against modern slavery. We hope governments will take note and partner with, empower, and listen to stakeholders from all levels and sectors to devise a nuanced, effective approach to combating trafficking.

Everyone has the potential for making a meaningful contribution to this fight. As journalists, I ask you to continue using your platforms to inform the public about human trafficking and how individuals can have an impact. Please speak with the TIP Heroes featured in our report and in our rollout event today. Help us elevate their work and inspire others to act in their communities.

In closing, the TIP Report is an important tool not just for governments, but for anyone combating human trafficking anywhere in the world. We are very

proud of the hard work of our partners throughout the State Department and around the world to produce this report and to make progress against this crime. I'd be happy to answer your questions.

**OPERATOR:** Ladies and gentlemen, if you'd like to ask a question, please press \* then 1 on your touchtone phone. You will hear a tone indicating you've been placed in queue, and you may remove yourself from queue at any time by pressing the pound key. If you're using a speakerphone, you will need to pick up the handset before pressing the number. Once again, for questions or comments, it's \*1 at this time.

And our first question comes from the line of Carol Morello of *The Washington Post*. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Hi, thank you for doing this. This report has a fairly lengthy section on the detrimental psychological damage that can be done to children who are institutionalized, whether in private institutions or in government-run facilities. I was wondering what you think that section says about the institutionalization of children who have been taken from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Thank you very much for the question. We do note in the report in general, including in the introductory section that you commented on, about the challenges and vulnerabilities of children that are in institutional settings as well as in the U.S. narrative this year. We note the vulnerabilities of children, whether they are unaccompanied or in institutionalized settings, as they are anywhere in the world.

For specific questions about what is happening within the United States and care of children in the States, we would refer you to our colleagues in the Department of Health and Human Services that oversee the care of children in their care – in institutions.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you. And our next question will come from the line of Gardiner Harris of *The New York Times*.

**QUESTION:** Hi. Like Carol, I'm interested in that section. I think you need to do better than just simply refer us to Health and Human Services. You are telling countries around the world that it's a bad idea to take children from their families and place them in institutionalized setting. You are saying that, thus, these children then can become victims of trafficking. It is a lengthy section and seems to contrast sharply with what the practice is.

Also, I wanted you – I wanted to understand – the President has been saying that his policies on the border are driven in part by a wave of child smuggling that is taking place at the border. I don't see anywhere in your report any notion that there is some sort of wave of child smuggling either in Honduras or El Salvador or Mexico. Can you explain the President's remarks? I think his quote was, "We're talking about child smuggling. We're talking about women smuggling..The worst it's been in history."

Is child smuggling and women smuggling now "the worst it's been in history,"

including, as he said, dating “back 200, 500, 1,000 years ago – the worst it’s ever been”?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Thank you for the question. Let me first take the second part of that question with respect to smuggling of children and women.

There are two distinct crimes of human trafficking and human – migrant smuggling is the term that we use. Our report and the work of our office focused on human trafficking, which is a crime of exploitation of individuals, whereas smuggling is a crime against the state and the illegal crossing of a border entry into a country, so it’s a crime of movement that is not necessary.

Sometimes it may be part of the crime of human trafficking, but our work focuses on the exploitation, so not smuggling. So we are really not the experts on statistics, whether in the United States or elsewhere, about human smuggling, and I would have to refer you to our colleagues in DHS that have the lead on human smuggling. We focus in the report and all of our work year-round, both in our engagement with other governments and the report itself, as well as working with our colleagues here in the interagency through the President’s Interagency Task Force on Human Trafficking in particular.

And we do note in the report that when there are issues that come up of children – the first part of your question – whether they are unaccompanied children or children that are in institutional facilities, that there should be screening in place. And we do have those mechanisms in place with our colleagues in DHS that do screen for trafficking indicators when children either cross the border unaccompanied or if they are in their care separated from their parents.

And then the important thing for the U.S., as in any other government, is if there are problems that come up, whether they are problems in detention facilities or that people have been identified as trafficking victims, that they’re referred to care and that there is an investigation of the traffickers, whether that is taking place in or outside of a government facility. And that is where we do note in the U.S. narrative as well we have those systems in place, and investigations do happen when problems arise.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**OPERATOR:** And once again, for questions it’s \*1 at this time. And our next question comes from the line of Susannah George of the Associated Press.

**QUESTION:** Hi there, thanks so much for doing this call. I just want to follow up a bit more on the section about institutionalization of children. How does this square with what we’ve seen unfold at the southern border? It seems like the zero-tolerance policy is creating a situation there which, by definition of this report, is creating – is putting a lot of children at greater risk of being trafficked.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** So thank you again for that question. I

will note that the report that we are releasing today covers the reporting period from April 1, 2017 through the end of March 2018. And we've noted, as you have also said, that there are vulnerabilities in the United States as elsewhere, when there are children either crossing borders alone or in government care, whether temporary or long term. And again, we work with our colleagues and they have systems in place to search for trafficking indicators, so that if there are cases where there are victims already or that problems arise that they identify those problems, get the victims the care that they need, and investigate the crimes.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you. And our next question comes from the line of Alicia Rose of NHK.

**QUESTION:** Hi. Thank you for doing the call. I was wondering if you could discuss the decision to downgrade Burma to Tier 3. And also, it's my understanding that this is the first time that Japan is listed as a Tier 1 country. What led to those decisions?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Sure. Thank you very much for those questions.

On Burma, we have tracked the situation of trafficking in Burma for a long time and had concerns about it for a long time. In this past year, we assessed that the government does not fully meet the minimum standards and is not making significant efforts, therefore it was put on Tier 3, as you noted. Our concerns include that Burmese Armed Forces operations in Rakhine State dislocated hundreds of thousands of Rohingya and members of other ethnic groups, many of whom were exploited throughout the region as a result. In addition, unlawful child soldier recruitment by the Burmese Armed Forces and ethnic armed groups continued. Authorities punish former child soldiers for desertion, alleged fraud and defamation, and authorities also continue to prevent the UN from playing a constructive role in eradicating the recruitment and use of children by ethnic armed groups. In addition, the military continued to subject adults and children to forced labor. Government officials were reportedly complicit in both sex and labor trafficking.

We urge Burma to implement all the recommendations in the TIP Report, especially those related to ceasing all unlawful recruitment of and use of children in the armed forces, and allowing the UN to conduct this work with armed – ethnic armed groups. We also urge the government to end its officials involvement in sex trafficking and forced labor and to hold such officials criminally accountable for these crimes.

And your second question was on Japan. You are correct that this is the first time that Japan has been ranked on Tier 1. It did so because of key achievements they made during the reporting period, which again is April 1, 2017 through the end of March. These achievements by the Government of Japan include establishing a new interagency taskforce to combat child sex trafficking in "JK businesses" they're called – I put those in quotation marks – which are dating services connecting adult men with underage girls and in forced pornography. The government also operationalized regulations and a new oversight mechanism for its technical intern-training program. And

finally, it acceded to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the 2000 TIP Protocol.

As with any Tier 1 country, however, there are key areas of improvement that remain for Japan. Authorities continue to prosecute traffickers under laws carrying lesser sentences, which courts often suspended in lieu of incarceration. Japan did not fully enforce the reform law provisions in the intern-training program aimed at blocking foreign-based recruitment agencies from charging excessive fees, a key driver of debt bondage. Authorities detained, charged and in some cases deported TITP interns who absconded from exploitive conditions and their contracted agencies rather than screening them and referring them to protective services. And many suspected cases of child sex trafficking and forced labor were addressed with administrative penalties or loss of business licenses rather than criminal investigations or prosecution. So you see, even for Tier 1 countries, we also have a lot to do, but we acknowledge that there were some key improvements made by the Government of Japan this year as well.

**MODERATOR:** Okay. Thank you. That's all the questions we have time for today. As a reminder, this call was on background, and is embargoed until Secretary Pompeo begins his remarks at approximately 2:00 p.m. this afternoon. Thank you again for joining us, and we'll see you at 2:00 p.m.

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