

Victims of Human Trafficking in Thailand: A Study of How Victim's Right is Protected in Criminal Proceedings

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Abstract

No country can evade the threat of transnational organized crime. To cope with transnational crime in form of human trafficking, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime along with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children supplements sets out the legislative measures for states parties to harmonize the provisions for protecting victim and witnesses of trafficking particularly for children and women in their domestic law as these victims and witnesses play an essential role on bringing the trafficker to justice but they are often confronted with the threat of intimidation and retaliation. In the view of fact, the key problems in Thailand which are corruption and miscarriage of justice give a chance for some law enforcements and government officials to be involved in an abuse of power which results in victims and witnesses feeling reluctant to cooperate with the authorities. Therefore, truly comprehensive anti-human trafficking responses which are legislative measures, preventive measures, national coordination and cooperation and international cooperation and coordination must be implemented in Thailand. Equally important is, for some cases which government officials tend to relate to obstruction of justice or corruption, only the relocation of victims and witnesses within Thailand cannot guarantee their safety. The suggestion is the relocation of victims and witnesses to another country which could ensure the safety of victims and witnesses.

Keywords: Human Trafficking, Victim, Protection

Introduction

This article aims to approach the issue of human trafficking in Thailand from a human rights perspective through the use of Thailand as a case study. For the matter of studying, this research will be divided into three sections. The first section will overview the protection and assist victims of trafficking measure according to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. The second section will provide a brief overview of the situation human trafficking in Thailand. Then the writer will examine how the Thai government is attempting to eradicate trafficking issue. Then, the attempt of the Thai government on eradicating trafficking issue will be examined. And, to what extent are these policy initiatives efficient. The last section will conclude this article.

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Overview the Protection and Assist Victims of Trafficking Measure According to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (hereafter the trafficking Protocol) supplementing the 2000 United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime encompass all forms of trafficking. This Protocol clearly defines the definition of trafficking¹ that the process of trafficking implies several steps which compose of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons.² The main purpose of the trafficking Protocol is to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, protect and assist the victims of such trafficking and promote cooperation among state parties in order to meet objectives.³ To guideline the state parties for combat with human trafficking efficiently, “the Framework for Action-To implement the trafficking in Person Protocols guideline”⁴ can be used as a technical assistance tool to assist state parties in the implementation of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children must be implemented as the basis standard for protecting victim of trafficking.⁵ The Framework is divided into five themes of prevention, protection and prosecution (the 3Ps) and national and International cooperation and coordination.

For the matter of this study, the writer will consider only on the protection and assist victims which stipulates in article 6 of the Trafficking Protocol.⁶ Moreover, according to the

¹ Trafficking Protocol is the first global agreement to contain a detailed definition of trafficking. (The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and Its Protocols)

² According to article 3 (a) of the trafficking Protocol, trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

³ United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, G.A. Res.55/25, Annex II, U.N.Doc A/Res/55/25 (Jan. 8, 2001), [hereinafter Palermo Protocol].

⁴ United Nations office on Drugs and Crime, *International framework for action. To Implement the trafficking in Persons Protocol* (United Nations, New York, 2009) 9.

⁵ The purpose of the United Nations Trafficking Protocol is defined in its article 2:

(a) To prevent and combating trafficking in persons, paying particular attention to women and children;

(b) To protect and assist the victims of such trafficking, with full respect for their human rights;

(c) To promote cooperation among state parties in order to meet those objectives.

⁶ Article 6 of the Trafficking Protocol states that “Assistance to and protection of victims of trafficking in persons

1. In appropriate cases and to the extent possible under its domestic law, each State Party protect the privacy and identity of victims of trafficking in persons, including, inter alia, by making legal proceedings relating to such trafficking confidential.

2. Each State Party shall ensure that its domestic legal or administrative system contains measures that provide to victims of trafficking in persons, in appropriate cases:

(a) Information on relevant court and administrative proceedings;

(b) Assistance to enable their views and concerns to be presented and considered at appropriate stages of criminal proceedings against offenders, in a manner not prejudicial to rights of the defense.

guideline, the forms of the protection and assist victims of trafficking may be summarized as follows: amend the necessary legislative measures for comprehensive protection and assistance to victims of trafficking and protection from re-victimization; strengthen the identification process; ensure the enforcement of legislation measures including by issuing regulations, strengthen national referral mechanisms; the application of international standards the special needs of children; access to compensation; possibility of temporary or permanent residency; non-liability of victims for their involvement in unlawful activities as a result for being trafficked and; the measures to ensure that the return of trafficked persons is undertaken on a voluntary basis that any decision to return is preceded by a risk assessment and with due regard for his/her safety.

How Is the Thai Government Attempting to Eradicate Trafficking Issue? and, to What Extent Are These Policy Initiatives Efficient?

Identification victims and protection of re-victimization

Knowing that Thailand is a major source of transit and destination country for trafficking. Not only women and girls that are falling victims of human trafficking, men and boys are also victims of trafficking in persons. The forms of victims of trafficking can be divided in two forms base on the final purposes of exploitation which are sexual exploitation and trafficking for labor exploitation. (Boonyobhas, 2013: 362) It can be seen that sex victims are forced into situation of sexual exploitation by lack of choice, compensation and legal status. In many circumstances, they got the physical injury and usually psychological trauma. In reality, there are still a majority of unidentified victims. Many victims of trafficking may be treated as undocumented migrant and caught outside a trafficking context,⁷ due to the government's victims procedure which tries to arrest and then deport victims of trafficking as immigration violators.⁸ For this reason, this may lead to the worse situation owing to inadequate victim identification procedures which may have resulted in pushing victims' risk of being re-victimized.

To strengthen the identification process, a comprehensive labor registration program has brought to include potential trafficking victims into the system. In addition, all relevant

3. Each State Party shall consider implementing measures to provide for the physical, psychological and social recovery of victims of trafficking in persons, including, in appropriate cases, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, other relevant organizations and other elements of civil society, and, in particular, the provision of:

- (a) Appropriate housing;
- (b) Counseling and information, in particular as regards their legal rights, in a language that the victims of trafficking in persons can understand;
- (c) Medical, psychological and material opportunities.

4. Each State Party shall take into account, in applying the provisions of this article, the age, gender and special needs of victims of trafficking in persons, in particular the special needs children, including appropriate housing, education and care.

5. Each State Party shall endeavor to provide for the physical safety of victims of trafficking in persons while they are within its territory.

6. Each State Party shall ensure that its domestic legal system contains measures that offer victims of trafficking in persons the possibility of obtaining compensation for damage suffered.

⁷ Nation states have a vested interest in maintaining the distinction between human trafficking and people smuggling because it provides a clear basis on which to maintain border control. Human trafficking and people-smuggling laws are seek to restrict immigration by prosecuting illegal entries for those who have been smuggled or rehabilitating and repatriating victim of trafficking. (Lyons and Ford, 2014)

⁸ Immigration Act 1979 section 29

agencies have signed MOU together to enhance government official competence in victim identification process. Therefore, the trafficked victims are now under a full legal protection by government which, as a result, reduces the chance of being victimized in human trafficking. Moreover, law government officials have improved their contribution in the multidisciplinary teams' victim identification process with strict observation of the standard operating procedures. (Thailand's Progress Report on Anti-human Trafficking Effort, 2015)

With reference to the investigation procedures on human trafficking cases, the victim identification process in Thailand starts after the step rescuing is completed. The process begins with the investigator who responsible for a case will screen the victims by using a standardize interview form as guided by the Anti-Trafficking Act 2008. Before the question begins, the police should assume all potential victims are victims. It means that the multidisciplinary team should treat potential victims with respect and avoid prejudicing attitude that the potential victim is criminal. Moreover, basic rights of potential victims should be informed including a safe place to conduct the initial interview and address basic needs, hunger, thirst, or pain to ensure that potential victims feel comfortable. Throughout the process of victim identification, it is essential that any information is confidential which helps protect the potential victim and his or her family when they return to their society.

While waiting for finalization the potential victim's status, victim shall be taken to one of a nine regional trafficking shelters which run by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) where counsel, legal assistance and medical care are provided; also the potential victim will be treated with age and gender sensitive treatment by all relevant officers.⁹

It is crucial that potential victims are not held in jail or immigration detention centers as this may cause a severe damage in their recovery and reintegration where the victims are too frightened to continue to cooperate with the government officials also this step needs to be ensure the safety of rescuing team members during and after the rescue as they may confront retribution from the traffickers.

The interview process will be conducted by well-trained social workers, psychologists, law enforcement officers and representative from NGOs. To identify the victim status, investigator will make determination on facts, evidence and opinions of multidisciplinary teams. If the results of the interview conclude the potential victim is victim, he or she will further stay in Thailand and access to educational or professional development opportunities and other sources of support. On the other hand, if he or she refuses to accept services provided by the law, and if the victim is a foreigner, concerned authorities of receiving country should consult the embassy or consulate of his or her country of origin. (Zero Draft Guidelines for Trafficking in Person Victim Identification within Greater Mekong Subregion) Before repatriation and reintegration the victim, the social worker has duty to conduct a risk assessment and actively follow up on the repatriation cases.¹⁰

⁹ Nation states have a vested interest in maintaining the distinction between human trafficking and people smuggling because it provides a clear basis on which to maintain border control. Human trafficking and people-smuggling laws are seek to restrict immigration by prosecuting illegal entries for those who have been smuggled or rehabilitating and repatriating victim of trafficking. (Lyons and Ford, 2014)

¹⁰ For victims from the Lao PDR and Myanmar, Thailand has active follow-ups on the repatriation cases in annual bilateral case management meeting. (Thailand's Progress Report on Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts, 2014: 10)

Non-liability of victims for their involvement in unlawful activities as a result for being trafficked

Trafficked persons shall not be detained, charged or prosecuted for the illegality of their entry into or residence in countries of transit and destination, or for their involvement in unlawful activities to the extent that such involvement is a direct consequence of their situation as trafficked persons. The anti-trafficking Act B.E. 2551 has provision on the non-prosecution of penalties to victim for their involvement in unlawful activities as a result for being trafficked,¹¹

Legal proceedings and disciplinary punishment against government officials involved in human trafficking

Allegations of trafficking-related corruption both in cases of sex trafficking and forced labor of migrants are prevalence in Thailand. The corruption is not confine to low-ranking official, alleging involvement of senior government officials. Refer to Roby and Tanner research in their study of prostitution and sexual trafficking mentioned that some law enforcement officials or government officials were reported to be brothels owners and routinely got bribe to help and detain victim of trafficking. (Roby & Tanner, 2009: 92) As can be seen that the women and children are forced into sex situation of sexual exploitation by lacking of reparation, rehabilitation and legal status. The example case is the corrupt officials abusing their power in the participation of transportation of trafficked victims by letting some migrant workers pass easily through numerous police and immigration checkpoints. (Sakdiyakorn and Vichitrananda, 2010: 55) Both human smugglers and traffickers are benefit from assisting individuals' illegal entry. For one case, the Director General of the Department of Employment and Director of Foreign Workers Administration were accused of having smuggled Cambodian workers into Thailand. Both of them have been removed from the active post to inactive post in the Office of the Permanent Secretary, the Prime Minister's Office. However, there was not enough evidence to press charges. (Thailand's Progress Report on Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts, 2015)

To combat with trafficking issues effectively, the Thai government responds with truly comprehensive legislation and policies which are;

1) The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) is assigned to be the core agency in coordinating the implementation of prevention and suppression of human trafficking. When the MSDHS is informed about alleged corruption, this agency will notify to the Office of Public Sector Anti-Corruption Commission (for junior officials) or Office of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (for senior officials) for consideration and then will forward the case to the original agency of the government official which is suspected of being involved in human trafficking to undertake legal action against such government officials. The disciplinary punishment is a government officials who found to negligent and incompetent in operating their duties must suddenly be removed from active posts. (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, 2012)

The Commission-General of the Royal Thai Police has implemented a policy for all new officers which require them to follow the guidance from the specialized training in accordance with the National Plan of Action to Protect Women and Anti-Trafficking in Persons in order to ensure effective administration of justice.

2) There is crucial in investigative procedure for the trafficking case. In general, a prosecutor has no power to initiate an investigation. He or she makes prosecution decisions only on the evidence presented in the investigation file. Most investigation responsibilities are undertaken by the Royal Thai police. The office of the Attorney General or prosecutors

¹¹ The Anti-Trafficking in Person Act B.E. 2551 section 41

are not granted the power to initiate an investigation or institute proceedings themselves unless an offence punishable under Thai law has been committed outside the Kingdom of Thailand.¹² The further investigation will be conducted by public prosecutors alongside with police officers to give advice and examine evidence at the beginning of an investigation process in the special case offences.¹³ For example, the cases of serious transnational crime, or crimes committed by an organized criminal group.¹⁴ This can enhance to speed up the legal process with better chance of successful prosecution.

3) The Anti-Trafficking in Person Act B.E. 2551 was enacted, entering into force on June 5, 2008. This Act is composed of six chapters divided as follows: the general content of the provision, the anti-trafficking in persons Committee, the powers and duties of the competent official, the provision of assistance and protection of safety to the trafficked person, the anti-trafficking in persons Fund and the penalties for traffickers. The Act criminally prohibits all forms of trafficking. This Act prescribes penalties ranging from four to ten years' imprisonment. This legislation provides a definition of human trafficking and also sets out penalties for offenders. This Act also stipulates the provision to combat with corruption in form of trafficking in persons which stated that *"obstructs the process of investigation, inquiry, prosecution or criminal proceedings on the offence of trafficking in persons so that the process is unable to be conducted in a well-manner."*¹⁵

The Protection of victim or government officials who report on trafficking crime from intimidation

1) To protect the victims from intimidation after judges decide to grant the bail, the Royal Police can file the objection to the court for any decision to grant the bail if there is possible impact on the case and the safety of victim when traffickers are released. Then, the court will reissue the notification to all immigration offices at all checkpoints to not allow the suspects from leaving the kingdom. Once the Immigration Bureau received the order from court, they will revoke suspects' visa and the suspects will have to be detained at immigration office.¹⁶

Another revenue is the prosecutor who responsible for trafficking cases will submit the objection in writing against the request along with supporting argument which is essential for the court to consider refusing the bail request; if the bail request is approved by the court, all relevant agencies in criminal justice system has duty to; 1) share information of the suspect with the Immigration Bureau to monitor and restrict cross movements. If there is the circumstance that the suspects tend to flee prosecution, the prosecutor will immediately file a request to terminate the bail order. 2) In case of foreign suspects, the Immigration Bureau will be notified to prevent them from escaping the Kingdom. Immigration Bureau may cancel their stay permit and bring the suspects under detention for the charge.

2) Victim of trafficking must be identified as basis for ensure the rights of victims from intimidation before, during and after prosecution of the crime. The United Nations Convention against Transnational Crime provides that measures to protect a victim or witness from retaliation or intimidation may include relocating victims or witnesses and permitting non-disclosure or limitation on the disclosure of information on the identity.¹⁷ Moreover,

¹² Criminal Procedure Code of Thailand section 20

¹³ The list of special case offences set out in the Annex Attached to the Special Case Investigation Act B.E. 2547

¹⁴ Special Case Investigation Act B.E. 2547 section 32

¹⁵ The Anti-Trafficking in Person Act B.E. 2551 section 54

¹⁶ Immigration Act 1979 section 20

¹⁷ The Trafficking Protocol article 6 paragraph 1, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime article 24. Article 24 paragraph 3 states that state parties shall

investigative techniques without establish reliance only on the testimony of victim already implemented in Thailand to lessen tension when victim has to confront with trafficker, for example using video conferencing¹⁸ during judicial process to avoid the re-victimization of trafficked person especially for children during criminal procedure.¹⁹ The concept of victim protection regimes in Thailand is very broad and embraces on a whole range of legal mechanisms. However, there is no the relocation of victim to another state particularly in cases dealing with corruption, victim-witnesses protection only in Thailand is not insufficient. Therefore, the domestic procedural laws should allow victim-witnesses from overseas to be located and protected in Thailand under witness protection program. At the same way, there should make an agreement with other countries allowing for Thai victim-witnesses to be relocated and protected overseas. If the relocation victims-witnesses to overseas measure are implemented, the victim-witnesses of trafficking will ensure that they are safe from intervention, interference, intimidation and retaliation and also increase incentives for victims to cooperate with government officials in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking.

3) The amendment to Anti-trafficking in person Act B.E. 2558 to increase the effectiveness of the law in preventing and suppressing human trafficking and to ensure that the government officials and those who report on trafficking crime will be protected from the fear of reprisal. The newly provision provides legal immunity and protection government authorities and those who report on trafficking crime from civil and criminal liabilities.²⁰ This provision also empowers government authorities to immediately shutdown workplaces or suspend operating licenses of factories and vehicles if wonder that have been used to assist in trafficking crime.²¹

International responses to fight against trafficking in persons

The international cooperation between Thailand and its neighbor countries as well as cooperation stated in other bilateral and multilateral framework to combat with human trafficking has been implemented. For example, in regional terms, the government has made bilateral agreements with the government of Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam. In addition, a multilateral memorandum joined by the government of Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, China and Vietnam represents cross-border commitments towards the legislative, preventive and protective actions that needed for the suppression of human trafficking by focusing on the fact that *trafficked women and children shall be considered victims, not violators or offenders*

consider entering into agreement with other states for the relocation entering into agreement with other states for the relocation of victims and witnesses.

¹⁸ Video conferencing refers to the use of interactive telecommunications technologies for witness or victim testimony via simultaneous two-way video and audio transmission. It allows the options of the witness testifying from a room adjoining the courtroom via closed-circuit television or from a distant or disclosed location through an audio-visual link. Videoconferencing offers benefit to reduce the threat to the witness's security and the danger of intimidation by the defendant in the courtroom. (Good practice for the protection of witnesses in criminal proceeding involving organized crime, 2008)

¹⁹ Criminal Procedure Code of Thailand section 172 (amended in 2008). In the taking of evidence where the consideration of sexuality, age, status, health and the mental state of witness or his fearfulness of an accused has been made, a trial may be conducted without a direct confrontation between a witness and the accused. This may be done by using close circuit television, electronic media tools, or other methods as prescribed in the rules of the Chief Justice and the taking of evidence may be acquired through a psychologist, a social worker or another person whom the witness has confidence in.

²⁰ Amendment to the Anti- Trafficking in Person Act B.E. 2558 Section 13/1

²¹ Amendment to the Anti- Trafficking in Person Act B.E. 2558 Section 16/2

of the migration law.²² This resulted in *minimizing vulnerability and promoting safe migration*.²³

Equally important is the bilateral agreements also provide with integral assistance in order to guarantee victims' right to return to their countries and family without being subject of any kind of stigmatization. It might be said that the reintegration of the victims in a sense of *freedom, self-esteem and human dignity*²⁴ can eliminate the problem of re-victimization. It can be seen that there is growing recognition of the importance of well-developed bilateral and multilateral memorandum. However, there are limitation in the difference in laws standards, (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010: 3) thus the need to enhance solidarity in our regional is required to address obstacles and to effective legal cooperation.

Conclusion

As mention earlier, in pursuit of the goals of combating trafficking in person, Thai government has made efforts to deal with human trafficking by conducting national policy, implementing preventive measures and engaging in law enforcement measures. However, it would be difficult to pinpoint to what degree Thailand fit into proper legal tools. This is because the nature of trafficking crime is often transnational in both commission and complicating the investigation and prosecution. Therefore, national policy and other legislations tools have been regularly reviewed that there are no loopholes for traffickers to escape prosecution.

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²² Memorandum of Understanding between the government of Thailand and the government of Vietnam on cooperation to combat trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Article 6

²³ Memorandum of Understanding between the government of Thailand and the government of Myanmar on cooperation to combat trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Article 4

²⁴ Memorandum of Understanding between the government of Thailand and the government of Cambodia on cooperation to combat trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Article 18

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