

*Report on Human Trafficking Issues
to the 2023 Annual Session
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by

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Madam President, fellow parliamentarians, please accept the following report on my activities since the 2022 Annual Session as the Special Representative on Human Trafficking Issues for the OSCE PA.

High-Level Meetings and Speaking Events

I continue to take every opportunity to raise human trafficking concerns and discuss best practices with high-level officials, especially with every foreign delegation that I meet, which averages about 1-3 for every week the U.S. House of Representatives is in session. In addition, human trafficking concerns resulting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the enormous number of Ukrainian refugees it caused have recently become a major focus of meetings and events, as has the importance of utilizing National Referral Mechanisms and the wisdom of local survivor-leaders.

Here is an excerpt of just some of the high-profile actions taken this year:

June 21, 2023. I was a keynote speaker at the screening of *Sound of Freedom*, a new Hollywood-produced film about the horrors of human trafficking. The film is based on the true-life story of a former special agent for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security who spent more than a decade fighting human trafficking rings and rescuing hundreds of children—at great personal peril to himself and his family. The film accurately portrays the vulnerability of children and the horrific exploitation they face at the hands of the criminals who operate worldwide human trafficking rings. The former special agent who is profiled in the movie, twice testified at congressional hearings I chaired in the U.S. Congress helping to inform our work on the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. The film itself will surely serve to increase public and cultural awareness about human trafficking and hopefully help us in our continued fight to end this modern-day slavery.

June 15, 2023. I attended the annual launch of the U.S. State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report (created by my original law) and met with the 2023 TIP Report Heroes. Later, I also met with Save Ukraine's Mykola Kuleba and Dmytro Filipenko. They recently conducted seven rescue operations for Ukrainian children who were abducted to Russia and Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine. They most recently rescued people stranded by the flooding after the dam explosion.

May 12, 2023. I chaired my 42nd congressional hearing on human trafficking. Conducted under the auspices of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations Subcommittee (which I chair) this hearing examined the Biden Administration's implementation of the Trafficking Victims Protect Act

(TVPA). The testimony exposed screening gaps at the southern border which have proven susceptible to human trafficking. I am pursuing legislative options to address these problems.

May 11, 2023. I voted to expand the anti-trafficking in persons provisions of US Border Enforcement policy, the same day that the pandemic-era Title 42 expired. Border control is fundamental to preventing the flow of illegal trafficking; all nations must remain vigilant at their ports of entry, with adequate funding for surveillance and security.

May 8, 2023. I served as a keynote panelist at the New Jersey Monmouth County Sheriff's Human Trafficking Symposium, detailing my fight to end this barbarous practice alongside local law enforcement officials who have been crucial allies. Other panelists included law enforcement, NGOs, and trafficking survivors. The event allowed me to hear from others who, like me, are dedicated to a survivor-informed approach to combating modern-day slavery.

April 18, 2023. I chaired a hearing of the Congressional-Executive Committee on China (CECC) that focused on the implementation of the 2021 Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act. This legislation has made great strides in combating China's brutal oppression and labor coercion of the minority faith.

March 1, 2023. I hosted the delegation from Thailand, led by Director-General Chettaphan of the Department of North American and South Pacific Affairs, for an in-depth conversation on the necessity for international collaboration in ending global human trafficking and promoting the use of more bilateral tools to combat and end human trafficking.

February 3, 2023. I hosted a meeting and round-table discussion with more than a dozen public prosecutors from across my home state of New Jersey to discuss new frontiers in the domestic battle against human trafficking—lessons learned and new tools to apply.

December 14, 2022. I met with Mykola Kuleba, Director of Save Ukraine, which has been evacuating children, especially orphans and children with special needs, from war zones. They offer shelter and psychological treatment to them. The particular focus of the discussion was the vulnerability of Ukrainian refugees to human trafficking.

December 7, 2022. I served as a key speaker at the Washington Parliamentary Intelligence-Security Forum and focused my presentation on child trafficking and child forced labor now rampant in the push by China to secure rare earth minerals from Africa and enhance China's control of the global supply chain.

December 5, 2022. I met with law enforcement experts specialized in internet crimes against children to discuss ways we can expand efforts to address this growing crime locally and abroad. I incorporated their partnership with domestic schools in my legislation.

September 23, 2022. At the public release of the U.S. Advisory Council Report—a human trafficking analysis conducted by survivor-leaders—my staff underscored the deep commitment to survivor-led anti-human trafficking programs. The Report aptly highlights priorities, from the perspective of survivor-leaders (our best experts), to effectively combat human trafficking. One of the outcomes of this meeting was vibrant discussions about the need to elevate survivor leadership, including exploring ways to consider a survivor as Ambassador-at-large for human trafficking.

September 8, 2022. A delegation of Pakistani leaders participating in the International Visitor Leadership Program met in the U.S. Capitol complex with my staff to discuss the evolution of the TVPA over the years as well as U.S. Congress' rulemaking process, checks and balances of the U.S. branches of government, whole-of-government approach to combatting trafficking in persons, and the current gaps and challenges to counter human trafficking.

August 1, 2022. I was the keynote speaker for the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons event for the OSCE special webinar where I discussed the history of trafficking in persons legislation in the U.S. and efforts going forward, including supply chain and prevention education.

July 19, 2022. The U.S. Department of State issued its 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report (the annual review of countries efforts to combat human trafficking created by my original law in 2000). Simultaneously, I issued my own press statement highlighting strengths and weakness in the report and discussed the report with several stakeholders.

July 14, 2022. As co-chairman of the House of Representatives Tom Lantos Commission on Human Rights, I chaired a hearing on child labor in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This hearing examined human rights violations in the DRC's mining sector, including child, and forced labor, disregard for worker safety, and environmental degradation. It looked at the role played by outside actors, including Chinese and Russian concerns, in corrupting government regulatory regimes in the DRC, and what impact this has on the global supply chain of certain extracted minerals. We also examined the key role of civil society in combatting such abuses.

July 8, 2022. The American Hotel and Lodging Association's hosted their *No Room for Trafficking* event at which I was represented by my lead staff on human trafficking. The forum focused in part on efforts, including legislation I have introduced in the past, to combat human trafficking in hotels, locally and abroad. I have worked for several years on specific legislation to

support and train hotel owners and their staff to combat human trafficking in their workplaces and among their guests. This concern has gained more attention.

Legislative Efforts

In February 2023, I introduced the Stop Forced Organ Harvesting Act of 2023, which would address, for the first time in the United States, forced organ harvesting and trafficking in human beings for the purpose of organ removal through sanctions and an annual report. This bill was adopted by the House by a vote of 413-2 and now awaits Senate action.

I will also be introducing the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2023, which has key domestic and foreign affairs provisions to ensure we reauthorize needed funding and enhance approaches to ramp up activities in the global fight against human trafficking.

Concern about the Vulnerability of Ukrainian Refugees to Human Trafficking

Almost 8 million refugees have fled Ukraine since Russia's massive invasion of Ukraine on February 24, the largest migration of people in Europe since the second world war. I want to thank the frontline states Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova, which have taken in this unprecedented flow of-refugees, and done so with incredible generosity from their governments, from their citizens, from NGOs and charitable organizations, and others.

This refugee crisis is different in that some 90% of those leaving Ukraine are women and children. Most cross the Ukrainian border without resources or a place to go, making them extremely vulnerable to human trafficking. In addition, trafficking networks from Ukraine to EU countries were already well-established before the war, and more Ukrainian women were trafficked into the EU than from any other country.

There continue to be credible reports that traffickers are trolling border areas, train stations, and refugee centers trying to lure refugees with promises of accommodation, onward transportation, or employment. Some are masquerading as volunteers or others providing assistance. Others are using social media and online advertising to lure potential victims, including through posts offering housing, employment, or other assistance.

Children are particularly vulnerable. Almost half of Ukrainian refugees are children. Thousands are unaccompanied, either because they have been evacuated from state care in Ukraine or because they have lost their parents or caretakers in the war.

Many refugees are having difficulty finding longer term housing and jobs due to lack of language skills and childcare. Some assistance programs are ending, and many humanitarian organizations are pulling out. The savings that many refugees had been living on are dwindling. Roma refugees from Ukraine are at risk as they face discrimination in assistance, housing, and jobs in many places.

Ukrainian orphans and unaccompanied minors are particularly vulnerable to falling prey to human traffickers. Thousands of displaced children in Ukraine have been unaccompanied, either because they were evacuated from state care or because they lost their parents or caretakers in the war, making them vulnerable to falling prey to human traffickers. As refugees, they need to be securely tracked and transferred into national child protection systems so that they do not fall prey to human trafficking or otherwise disappear. Particularly at the beginning of the war, many children simply passed through borders and may have gone missing.

A recent survey of Ukrainian women refugees conducted by ODIHR found that since leaving Ukraine, many had experienced sexual harassment, received requests for sexual favors, proposals to work in the commercial sex industry or produce pornographic materials, or even suffered sexual violence. Two in five said they were worried about human trafficking while almost half had not received information on how to stay safe.

Based on the survey results, ODIHR has issued several recommendations. I would like to highlight a few: countries hosting refugees ensure proper vetting in assistance, housing, and employment programs; train stakeholders working with refugees on victim identification and on taking a trauma-informed approach; work to disrupt online recruitment platforms targeting Ukrainian refugees; and address demand.

The OSCE has been very active in preventing and addressing the vulnerability of Ukrainian refugees to human trafficking.

The Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator has since last March been distributing messages informing Ukrainian refugees about safety concerns and resources. Facebook and Instagram pages “Work Safe!” were created to promote safety among job seekers and share verified hotline numbers to assist refugees. Thomson Reuters partnered with the OSCE to examine whether there was a demand for Ukrainian women for sexual exploitation, including human trafficking through real-time, in-depth data analysis of internet patterns. This project “found clear signals that human traffickers are preying on Ukrainians escaping the war and that

the demand for online sexual services is fueling the criminal profitability of exploitation.”¹ Some of the evidence included “increases of up to 300% in global online interest in a range of sexually derogatory search terms related to Ukrainian women. This pattern is consistent across Europe. Social media is the primary means that traffickers use to lure, groom, and advertise their victims.”²

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has also undertaken significant action to protect Ukrainian refugees. ODIHR has conducted rapid National Referral Mechanism (NRM) assessment visits to Romania, Moldova, Slovakia and the Czech Republic focusing on strengthening anti-trafficking response systems resulting in drafting assessment reports and providing specific recommendations to strengthen and support NRM frameworks and partnerships. ODIHR also conducted three trainings for civil society and frontline responders on addressing human trafficking risks in the context of Russia’s military attack on Ukraine with participants from 102 organizations from 32 countries. As I mentioned previously, ODIHR conducted a survey on the safety and security of women refugees fleeing Ukraine, which collected empirical data to better inform the development of responses to addressing the vulnerabilities and risks of Ukrainian women refugees to human trafficking. The survey reached 980 women refugees from Ukraine providing insights into the lived experiences, concerns, and challenges that women refugees face.

In addition, ODIHR’s NRM Handbook has several important new concepts that I think are crucial to preventing Ukrainian refugees from falling prey to human traffickers and assisting victims who do. First, it recognizes the crucial role that survivors can play in informing policy development and make its implementation as effective as possible. Survivors are the real experts; their lived experiences and their perspectives can help inform our policies and our legislation and make them more effective. Second, it recognizes the effects that trauma can have on trafficking victims and describes how that must be taken into account in identification and assistance efforts. Third, it addresses children and their needs separately from adults. We must do more to prevent children from being trafficked, and we must ensure that assistance for child victims is culturally responsive, age-appropriate, and trauma-informed.

I hope that the OSCE will do more to address the demand that fuels human trafficking. The OSCE has done a lot to address labor trafficking in supply chains, particularly those related to public procurement, and now should do more to address the demand for sex trafficking, including Ukrainian refugees, and the trafficking in human beings for the removal of organs.

¹ <https://www.thomsonreuters.com/en-us/posts/our-purpose/how-technology-is-being-used-to-combat-human-trafficking/>

² Ibid.

Continued Support for the OSCE/ODIHR International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council

I continue to support the OSCE/ODIHR “International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council,” or ISTAC, the first such council established by an international organization. ISTAC was featured in the State Department’s 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report. I also welcome the establishment of its second cohort of human trafficking survivor leaders on June 21, 2023.

The United States established its own Advisory Council on Human Trafficking in 2015 as a platform to enable trafficking survivors to provide recommendations on federal anti-trafficking policies to the President’s Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (PITF). Members of the Council are appointed by the President for two-year terms. In 2019, the U.S. State Department launched its own Human Trafficking Expert Consultant Network (the Network), which among other things, has provided comments to the U.S. delegation during negotiations of OSCE Ministerial decisions. I, myself, find recommendations from survivors extremely valuable in the legislative process for both hearing testimony and writing legislation, as they have informed the original TVPA of 2000 and the other four reauthorizations signed into law—all of which I authored—including, as well the two I introduced for reauthorization in September 2021 and February 2022.

ISTAC members have been actively participating in OSCE and other international events, where they have made many valuable recommendations. I urge all your countries to consult with ISTAC members as well as to create your own survivor-leader councils to provide a platform for survivor voices to be heard by policymakers.

U.S. State Department *Trafficking in Persons Report 2023* Partnership: Effectively Prosecuting, Protecting, and Preventing Trafficking in Persons

The 2023 *Trafficking in Persons Report*³ was released on June 15, 2023, by Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Required by my *Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000*, this report is one of the most successful ways the U.S. promotes best practices and ensures government accountability for the minimum standards to eliminate human trafficking. This annual report lays bare the progress of 187 countries, including the United States, via a tier ranking and narrative—with recommendations for improvements.

³ U.S. Department of State, *2023 Trafficking in Persons Report* (June 2023) <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

Tier 1 countries fully meet the minimum standards for eliminating human trafficking. Tier 2 countries do not meet the minimum standards but are making a significant effort to do so. Tier 2 Watch List countries are in a grace period and in real danger of becoming Tier 3 unless they show significant effort to go along with their promise. Tier 3 countries do not meet the minimum standards and are not making significant effort to do so. Along with the embarrassment of being listed on Tier 3, Tier 3 countries are open to sanctions by the U.S. government.

This year's report focused on the essential role of effective, multidisciplinary partnerships in the prosecution, protection, and prevention framework, known as the "3P's", for combating this crime. As the report explains, "a comprehensive approach to human trafficking requires governments to prioritize multiple layers of cooperation, including internally between government agencies and externally with other governments, international organizations, the private sector, academia, media, community leaders, NGOs, and survivors and survivor-led organizations. Over the years, multilateral organizations have been at the forefront of establishing and supporting a strong international framework for partnerships to address human trafficking."

The report highlights the importance of partnerships and collaboration in upholding the "3P" framework and making meaningful progress in combatting human trafficking. It notes that "strategic, multi-disciplinary partnerships can enhance the work of governments, the private sector, NGOs, and survivors and survivor-led organizations to further investigations and prosecutions, support victim identification and protection efforts, and develop targeted prevention programs. Partnerships can also better equip anti-trafficking stakeholders to respond to evolving human trafficking trends, such as refining and leveraging advancements in technology, collaborating to eliminate forced labor in supply chains, and sharing information and resources to better address the nexus between human trafficking and climate change."

The mechanisms highlighted in the report include interagency coordination; partnerships with survivors, civil society, and other external stakeholders; and partnerships to further investigations and address cross-border trafficking. Coordination across various sectors is key in global anti-trafficking efforts, as "government partnerships with domestic and international NGOs, including survivor-led organizations, are critical to both a comprehensive response to trafficking cases and supporting national action plans as well as resulting programs and policies. NGOs are often funded by governments to provide protection services to victims and contribute to the preparation and implementation of national guidelines for victim identification and referrals to law enforcement. When governments share resources, information, and decision-making ability with organizations working towards a common goal, these partnerships will begin to build a more trusted and collaborative anti-trafficking response."

I appeal to you as legislators to consider establishing these networks of partnerships in your countries and with others. Investigate and address the root causes of trafficking, improve victims' access to care, make critical technological advancements, develop expanded cross-border collaboration, and achieve better legal outcomes for victims. Please keep refining your countries' trafficking laws and please use your oversight functions to ensure their full implementation. Lives depend on it.

Participating States Making Measurable Progress: Denmark

There was not much change last year in terms of Tier rankings of OSCE participating States. One standout was Denmark, which “made key achievements during the reporting period, considering the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore, Denmark was upgraded to Tier 1. These achievements included prosecuting more traffickers and convicting traffickers for the first time in three years; establishing a special crimes unit with designated police and prosecutors investigating organized crime and other serious crimes, including trafficking. Additionally, the government identified more trafficking victims, granted compensation and restitution to victims, and, for the second consecutive year, granted a temporary residence permit to a trafficking victim. Furthermore, the government developed guidance on preventing labor trafficking in corporate value chains.”⁴

Participating States Losing Ground in the Fight Against Trafficking: Montenegro and Slovenia

The fight against trafficking in persons requires constant vigilance. Montenegro was downgraded this year to the Tier 2 Watchlist. “The government did not convict any traffickers and reorganized the police office dedicated to investigating trafficking, which reduced its ability to conduct proactive investigations. The government did not quickly act and establish alternative means of victim protection after experts published credible allegations of abuse by an employee with management duties of the government-funded, NGO-run anti-trafficking shelter (anti-trafficking shelter), including physical violence against victims, intimidation, and blackmail. Following the misconduct allegations, civil society and international organizations ceased victim referrals to the anti-trafficking shelter.... Consequently, there was no alternative shelter or specialized assistance for trafficking victims at the end of the reporting period. The government attempted to organize accommodations for child victims in foster families; however, it did not develop a concrete plan to provide victim protection for adult victims.”⁵

⁴ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/denmark/>

⁵ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/montenegro/>

Slovenia was downgraded to Tier 2 this year. “The government amended its anti-trafficking law, drafted updated guidance for labor inspectors to identify victims, and following a concerning case of alleged labor trafficking, hired new labor inspectors and trained labor inspectors on victim identification. The government also increased funding to victim services, cooperated with EU member states in law enforcement efforts, and continued raising awareness among children and adolescents in schools. However, these efforts were not serious and sustained compared with efforts during the previous reporting period... NGOs continued to assert the government did not prosecute labor traffickers because authorities instead pursued cases as administrative labor code violations, resulting in lesser penalties and little deterrence. While funding for victim assistance and training on victim identification increased, the government identified fewer victims, and lack of proactive victim identification efforts resulted in the government not identifying any labor trafficking victims.”⁶

Participating States Remaining on the Tier 2 Watchlist: Bulgaria and Serbia

Two OSCE participating States remained on the Tier 2 Watchlist: Bulgaria and Serbia. Bulgaria did make some progress by “convicting more traffickers, informally adopting new NAPs for 2022 and 2023, and utilizing seized assets to supplement shelters and specialized service centers directly assisting trafficking victims. Additionally, the prosecutor general mandated specialized trafficking training for investigative prosecutors and magistrates and required the assignment of trafficking cases to those individuals. The National Investigative Service (NIS) established a cyber unit, focusing on internet-based exploitation, including trafficking, and financial investigations, and assisted regional police in investigating crimes with online components... However, the caretaker government did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period, even considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity. Courts continued to issue suspended sentences for most convicted traffickers (68 percent), which weakened deterrence, did not adequately reflect the nature of the crime, and undercut broader efforts to fight trafficking. Authorities did not adequately screen for trafficking indicators or identify victims, particularly among vulnerable groups, such as Roma. In addition, a limited number of identified victims received assistance (29 percent). Moreover, the caretaker government provided limited funding to NGOs for victim services and to the National Commission for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (NCCTHB) for capacity building and implementation of anti-trafficking activities, limiting the sustainability of the government’s anti-trafficking systems.”⁷

⁶ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/slovenia/>

⁷ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/bulgaria/>

Serbia also remained on the Tier 2 Watchlist. Although it has made efforts including “identifying more victims and the Center for Protection of Trafficking Victims (CPTV) establishing a panel with a psychologist, educator, and social worker to conduct official victim assessments within 24 hours of a referral... However, the government did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period, even considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity. The government investigated and prosecuted fewer defendants and convicted fewer traffickers. The government decreased resources to the CPTV despite their continued lack of staff, skills, and resources necessary to consistently assess victims, coordinate care placement, and operate the CTPV-run shelter. SOPs on victim identification remained unclear on roles and responsibilities, and implementation was “recommended” rather than required... The Anti-Trafficking Council has not met in three years, the government still has not adopted the 2021-2022 NAP, and the position of the National Coordinator remained vacant. Official complicity in trafficking crimes remained a significant concern, with authorities demonstrating tolerance of trafficking crimes and inaction in several cases. The government continued to not fully protect victims or fully investigate credible allegations that approximately 500 Vietnamese workers were subjected to forced labor at a People’s Republic of China (PRC)-owned factory.⁸

OSCE Participating States Remaining on Tier 3: Belarus, Russia and Turkmenistan.

Three OSCE participating States have remained on Tier 3 for several years. Belarus “decreased trafficking-related investigations and prosecutions and identified and referred to services fewer trafficking victims. The government did not report if it investigated, prosecuted, or convicted any traffickers under its trafficking statute and did not provide adequate protection services to trafficking victims. Media and NGO reports indicated authorities continued to heighten migrants’ trafficking vulnerabilities, including by facilitating the entry into Belarus and onward travel of many third-country migrants and asylum seekers who arrived in the country as part of the state-sponsored migration crisis, returning some of these migrants to their countries of origin without screening for trafficking; the government also did not report screening of Ukrainian refugees. Moreover, as part of its broader repression of civil society and independent, pro-democracy activism, the government widely limited the activities of civil society organizations, including organizations providing support to trafficking victims, and did not provide funding or in-kind assistance to NGOs.”⁹

Russia also remained on Tier 3. “During the reporting period there was a government policy or pattern of trafficking of Ukrainian citizens and North Korean workers. There were also

⁸ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/serbia/>

⁹ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/belarus>

reports of Russian officials forcing, deceiving, or coercing foreign national adults to fight in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. As part of its war of aggression against Ukraine, the Russian government operated a sprawling filtration operation and detention system that included the use of forced labor. The government continued to perpetuate the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) imposition of forced labor conditions on North Korean workers. The government did not screen North Korean workers in Russia for trafficking indicators or identify any North Korean trafficking victims, despite credible reports in previous years that the DPRK operated work camps in Russia and exploited thousands of North Korean workers in forced labor. The government issued or re-issued 4,723 visas to North Koreans in 2022 in an apparent attempt to circumvent UN Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs) prohibiting DPRK overseas labor. The government did not report how many North Korean workers remained in Russia in 2022. Separate from this complicity, the government did not report identifying any trafficking victims, and its efforts to prosecute and convict traffickers decreased. Authorities continued to lack a process for victim identification and referral to care, and the criminal code did not establish a definition for a trafficking victim, hindering identification efforts and limiting access to victim services. The government offered no funding or programs to provide services for trafficking victims, and authorities routinely penalized victims and potential victims for unlawful acts committed solely as a direct result of being trafficked. As in previous years, the government did not draft a national strategy or assign roles and responsibilities to government agencies to combat human trafficking.

“Additionally, the government engaged in conduct that created populations that are highly vulnerable to trafficking. The government's forcible transfer of thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia, including by forcibly separating some children from parental figures, greatly increased the separated children's vulnerability to trafficking. Moreover, the government's war against Ukraine created millions of refugees fleeing Ukraine, as well as those internally displaced by Russia's aggression, all of whom were highly vulnerable to trafficking. The scale and scope of such conduct raise real and serious concerns regarding significant potential risks of trafficking.”¹⁰

Turkmenistan “does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and, even considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity, is not making significant efforts to do so; therefore Turkmenistan remained on Tier 3. Despite the lack of significant efforts, the government took some steps to address trafficking, including by granting access to an international organization to monitor the cotton harvest, providing in-kind support for anti-trafficking awareness campaigns and training officials in collaboration with international organizations. However, during the reporting period there

¹⁰ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/russia/>

was a government policy or pattern of forced labor; the government continued to direct policies that perpetuated the mobilization of adults for forced labor in the annual cotton harvest, in public works projects, and in other sectors in some areas of the country. As in previous years, the government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions; did not hold any officials accountable for their complicity in forced labor crimes; identified no victims; and did not fund any victim assistance programs.”¹¹

Conclusion

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has added a major new challenge to our effort to prevent and combat human trafficking. We must do all we can to protect Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons from falling prey to human traffickers, to identify and assist victims, and to prosecute perpetrators.

Likewise, we must be vigilant about how forced organ harvesting and trafficking in human beings for the purpose of organ removal remain hidden in plain sight. We must collaborate with UNODC and others who have taken the lead to combat this crime. We must also continue to respond to new challenges and ensure that our efforts are effective against new trends such as an increase in the use of digital technologies.

I urge you all to work within your parliaments to strengthen your legislation and policies to combat human trafficking. We need international cooperation and coordination now more than ever. Please join me in this effort until we have raised a generation that is free of human trafficking.

¹¹ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/turkmenistan/>