

*Report on Human Trafficking Issues
to the 2026 Annual Session
of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly*

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by

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Madame President, fellow parliamentarians, please accept the following report on my activities since the 2025 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, I have brought up the importance of utilizing National Referral Mechanisms and the wisdom and leadership of local survivor-leaders.

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

July 16, 2025. I served as the honorary co-chair of and attended a briefing entitled “Uniting to Prevent Human Trafficking and to Bring Hope to Survivors” with the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. This briefing served to discuss current initiatives to combat human trafficking globally and to garner support for HR 1144.

July 23, 2025. I attended CPAC’s 3rd Annual International Summit Against Human Trafficking, hosted in the Cannon House Office Building. This critical event furthers our commitment to ending modern-day slavery by bringing together survivors, lawmakers, advocates, and law enforcement to advance bold solutions to combat trafficking.

September 18, 2025. I participated in the Anti-Trafficking in Persons (ATIP) roundtable in the Hart Senate building to highlight my legislation and oversight efforts.

November 17, 2025. I met with representatives of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) and the Immigration Accountability Project (IAP) to discuss the efforts of immigration groups to prevent human trafficking.

November 18, 2025. I met with courageous survivors of abuse perpetrated by Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell to discuss their crusade for justice, accountability, and systemic reforms prevent exploitation and human trafficking of vulnerable individuals.

January 7, 2026. After the conclusion of a briefing by members of the Administration, I spoke with Attorney General Pam Bondi about the important anti-trafficking measures that would be codified by HR 1144.

January 13, 2026. As a follow up to my conversation with AG Bondi, I spoke at length with Assistant Attorney General Patrick Davis at the Department of Justice to discuss HR 1144 and solicit the Administration's recommendations and support to advance my reauthorization bill.

February 3, 2026—Present. I met with a group of stalwart human trafficking survivor-leaders and advocates for an in-depth conversation about their informed perspectives on combatting human trafficking. Since then, me and my staff check in with them on a weekly or biweekly basis to discuss legislation and various efforts to combat human trafficking on our soil.

February 11, 2026. I met with author and veteran of the Benghazi Embassy Attack Mark Geist. He uses his position not only to advocate for veterans' mental health issues but also to address and prevent child trafficking, something he investigated firsthand as a law enforcement officer. We discussed policy proscriptions and DOJ action being taken to recover missing children and expose trafficking networks operating in the US and internationally.

March 4, 2026. I recorded remarks for broadcast during the 2nd Annual New Jersey Coalition Against Human Trafficking Law Enforcement Conference. One focus of this year's conference was identifying and combatting trafficking during high-profile events such as the FIFA World Cup, which would have matches held in the New Jersey - New York metropolitan area. My remarks centered on the need to properly train and equip officers and formulate a legislative response to trafficking operations centered on prevention, protection, and prosecution.

March 24, 2026. I recorded remarks for broadcast during the 9th Annual UNC Pembroke Human Trafficking Conference. This year's conference focused on Survivor Leadership, and my remarks concerned the need for coordination between law enforcement and community networks, as well as the importance of recognizing the lived experiences of survivor-leaders that ensure anti-trafficking policies are effective and grounded in reality.

March 25, 2026. I participated in a roundtable discussion with the America First Policy institute (AFPI), "Ending Human trafficking: An America First Priority." This conversation with experts, survivor-leaders, and legislators was convened to address human trafficking as a human rights crisis and pursue the restoration of security and dignity for vulnerable populations.

April 23, 2026. I convened a press conference at the US Capitol House Triangle to call for the passage of HR 1144. I was joined by original cosponsor Rep. Kweisi Mfume (D-MD), survivor-leaders, and anti-trafficking organization representatives. Rep. Mfume and I encouraged our colleagues to support and vote for the bill, and each speaker called upon their experience as a survivor-leader or advocate to make the case for the legislation's historic provisions.

April 23, 2026. I took the opportunity both before and after the press conference to meet privately with survivor-leaders to discuss HR 1144, as well as future opportunities to more efficiently combat human trafficking.

May 27, 2026. I spoke on a panel at the Monmouth County Human Trafficking Symposium in Freehold, New Jersey, organized by Sheriff Shaun Golden. This symposium highlighted human trafficking as the fastest-growing criminal enterprise in the world and proposed victim-informed solutions for cooperative implementation between local, state, and federal law enforcement.

June 26, 2026. I joined Lynn Shaw on her podcast *Lynn's Warriors* for an hour-long discussion on combatting human trafficking and bringing perpetrators to justice. This included an in-depth discussion of HR 1144 and the June 11th announcement from the Department of Justice of investigations and indictments of fraudulent “sponsors” responsible for trafficking children across the southern border and throughout the interior of the United States.

June 30, 2026. I met with Paraguay’s first National Coordinator to Combat Human Trafficking, Graciela Noguera, to discuss best practices and the development of their first national action plan. They plan to utilize the U.S. Annual Trafficking in Persons’ Report as a guideline and the U.S. National Action Plan, first published under President Trump, as a template to develop theirs. We will continue to collaborate and find opportunities to improve prevention, protection, and prosecution efforts across Latin America.

Congressional Hearings I chaired related to Human Trafficking

March 25, 2025

[Metals, Minerals, and Mining: How the CCP Fuels Conflict and Exploitation in Africa](#)
[Rep. Smith's Opening Remarks](#)

June 5, 2025

[Promoting Labor Rights in the Cut Flower Industry](#)
[Rep. Smith's Opening Remarks](#)

January 22, 2026

[Advancing Peace in DRC and Rwanda Through President Trump's Washington Accords](#)
[Rep. Smith's Opening Remarks](#)

February 10, 2026

[Advancing Peace in DRC and Rwanda through President Trump’s Washington Accords – Part II](#)
[Rep. Smith's Opening Remarks](#)

April 16, 2026

[Dark Nets, Illicit Labor—Confronting China’s IUU Fishing and Seafood Supply Chain](#)
[Rep. Smith's Opening Remarks](#)

May 14, 2026

[A Market Built on Victims: Stopping Illegal Organ Trafficking in China and Beyond](#)
[Rep. Smith's Opening Remarks](#)

Legislative Efforts

As parliamentarians, we must take legislative action to stop human trafficking abuses and protect the most vulnerable. As the principal author of the original Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-386) and its three subsequent reauthorizations and International Megan’s Law, I have seen firsthand how legislation has helped prevent trafficking, protect individuals, and hold perpetrators accountable for their heinous crimes. I urge all of you to consider whether stronger legislation is needed in your country.

Currently, I have three bipartisan anti-trafficking bills in Congress.

H.R. 1144, the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act, ensures the continuation of the United States' most comprehensive anti-trafficking framework. While Congress has passed related bills, H.R. 1144 contains the remaining authorities and programs still in need of reauthorization, including the State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, domestic child trafficking prevention education programs, first-time authorization of housing, reauthorization of International Megan’s Law and the Department of Homeland Security Angel Watch Program to protect children, and much more.

H.R. 2310, The COBALT Supply Chain Act creates a rebuttable presumption for cobalt entering the U.S.—this means that it is presumed that any cobalt-related item entering the U.S. has been tainted with child forced labor and must be proven otherwise. Most cobalt is sourced and refined through child forced labor in Democratic Republic of Congo mines—largely owned and run by China. We must ensure that the supply chains for our electronics and electric vehicles are not tainted with the blood of children. The UK has introduced a companion bill.

H.R. 1503, the Stop Forced Organ Harvesting Act confronts one of the most grotesque human rights abuses in our time: the trafficking in persons for the purpose of organ harvesting. This is butchering and murder masquerading as medicine. This most commonly occurs through Chinese CCP state-sanctioned murder of prisoners of conscience—especially Uyghurs and Falun

Gong practitioners—for the purpose of organ harvesting. These are crimes against humanity, where bodies are commodified and young lives are extinguished for profit. The United States will impose strict sanctions on those involved in or benefitting from this horrific trade—including asset freezes, visa bans, fines up to \$1 million and criminal penalties up to 20 years in prison. This bill also requires the United States to produce comprehensive reports on organ trafficking to hold perpetrators accountable.

Continued Concern about Ukrainian Children Forcibly Transferred by Russia

Since the start of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has taken thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia or Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine. Most are still missing and may have been put up for adoption or forcibly Russified, which is a war crime. Russia has claimed that it is protecting Ukrainian children; more recently it is claiming that Ukrainian children living in the areas of Ukraine, which Russia illegally occupies are now Russian citizens, so no international law applies. In reality, Russia is forcibly Russifying Ukrainian children in an apparent strategy to erase their identity, which could amount to genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention.

In May 2023, a number of OSCE participating States invoked the “Moscow Mechanism,” an OSCE tool that triggers and international investigation of a particularly serious human rights issue, to examine Russia’s forced transfer and assimilation of Ukrainian children. The resulting report found that Russia placed Ukrainian children in Russian institutions or families – including through adoption, guardianship or foster families, where they have been subjected to pro-Russian information campaigns often amounting to targeted re-education. Moreover, it found that Russia has created obstacles for families seeking to get their children back and its non-consensual “evacuations”, transfers and prolonged displacement of Ukrainian children, which the report concluded constitute violations of international humanitarian law, and in certain cases amount to war crimes.

In May of this year, a group of States again invoked the Moscow Mechanism to follow-up and provide an update about the situation of Ukrainian children forcibly relocated by Russia. There have been increasing reports that the Russian Federation is subjecting Ukrainian children to forced militarization and indoctrination into the Russian military. The report was invoked in May and is expected to be discussed in the OSCE Permanent Council and released the second week of July.

On the margins of the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Gdansk June 24-26, the OSCE launched the R.E.S.T.O.R.E. (Recovery and Empowerment Systems to Overcome Risk and Exploitation) Ukraine Alliance to Fight Human Trafficking in Ukraine Reconstruction Efforts, together with Ukraine, Austria, Canada, Italy, and Poland. The Alliance is a platform to bring

together governments, businesses, tech, and civil society to prevent human trafficking and exploitation in reconstruction efforts. What is expected to be the largest reconstruction effort since World War II will take place in the context of a deficit in the labor force of Ukraine necessitating bringing in foreign workers, uncontrolled online recruitment through social media, high displacement and refugee return, and complex supply chains that will raise the risks of labor and sex trafficking and exploitation. The OSCE will provide guidelines for businesses and employers, model procurement policies, awareness raising materials, and connections for assistance and support. The Alliance is open to all countries, as well as businesses and organizations.

Russia must be held accountable for these crimes and atrocities against Ukraine. We also must call for the safe return and reunification of these children with their families or for those without families, find permanent placements for them.

Trafficking for Forced Criminality in Cyber Scam Centers

Trafficking for forced criminality in cyber scam centers has become one of the fastest-growing and most profitable criminal enterprises. It is now on a scale with traditional organized crime. It is estimated by the global Anti-Scam Alliance to garner between \$500 billion and \$1 trillion per year. Perpetrators often target individuals with multilingual capacity for recruitment through deceptive employment advertisements on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Telegram. Documenting this, the OSCE has published a report on “Trafficking into Cyber Scam Operations: Implications for the OSCE Region.”

Fighting trafficking for forced criminality requires a comprehensive, transnational approach that prioritizes intelligence sharing, legal reform, and operations that treat rescued individuals as victims of crime rather than perpetrators. Identifying victims of trafficking for forced criminality and prosecuting perpetrators may require specific training and investigation techniques, including specialized police units such as those we have set up in the United States and that have been set up in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Thailand.

I urge you to strengthen your legal frameworks to explicitly recognize forced criminality as a form of human trafficking, including trafficking for forced criminality in cyber scam centers. Survivors who are compelled to commit crimes should be treated as victims deserving of protection—not as perpetrators.

I was proud to cosponsor H.R. 4323, the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act, which became law in 2025 and provides trafficking survivors with opportunities for criminal record relief and expungement. I am also working with President Trump to secure pardons and clemencies for trafficking survivors who were forced into criminal conduct, including the successful pardon of

Hollie Nadel. I remain committed to partnering with survivors as they pursue healing, justice, and the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

In addition, I encourage you to work with your governments to:

1. Develop or strengthen regulations requiring employment agencies, recruiters, and employment agencies to register, verify, and maintain audit trails of recruitment activities and candidate placements as well as to increase monitoring of online job platforms and social media used for recruitment.
2. Develop awareness raising campaigns about deceptive employment advertisements that could lead to trafficking for forced criminality in cyber scam centers.
3. Engage with Facebook, Telegram, LinkedIn, VK, and other online platforms to enhance detection, reporting and removal of recruitment content linked to cyber scam centers.
4. Establish specialized prosecution units focused on trafficking for forced criminality as well as specialized financial investigation units targeting money laundering and illicit financial flows, including those associated with scam center operations.
5. Provide specialized training for law enforcement to identify victims of forced criminality in online scams, refer them to protection services, and gather electronic evidence effectively.
6. Adopt and implement legislation and prosecutorial guidance to prevent the arrest and prosecution of survivors of trafficking for forced criminality and the unlawful acts they were forced to commit as a direct consequence of being trafficked.
7. Provide accessible avenues for criminal record relief and expungement for survivors, accompanied by clear procedures, legal aid and confidentiality protections, to remove barriers to employment, education and housing, and to put in place legal remedies to clear debts imposed on trafficking victims through fraud or coercion.
8. Development of national guidelines that define trauma-informed, age-appropriate, and biological sex sensitive assistance, including minimum service standards and pathways to long-term stability such as secure housing, healthcare, psychosocial support, education, vocational training and access to decent employment.

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. I also

believe that the OSCE should develop staff training on trauma-informed approaches and for the prevention and response to harassment in the workplace for OSCE staff to better inform their engagements with vulnerable populations, including trafficking survivor-leaders.

The United States established its own Advisory Council on Human Trafficking in 2015—and recently made it a permanent part of government—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. 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 subsequent reauthorizations.

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, with fair remuneration and safe engagement conditions.

U.S. State Department *Trafficking in Persons Report 2025*

The 2025 *Trafficking in Persons Report*¹ was released on September 29, 2026. 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.

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

¹ U.S. Department of State, *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report* (September 2025)
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report>

embarrassment of being listed on Tier 3, Tier 3 countries are open to sanctions by the U.S. government.

This year's report recognized the 25th anniversary of its initiation.

"The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), passed in October 2000, was a landmark piece of legislation representing the culmination of years of persistent advocacy and collaboration among anti-trafficking advocates, survivor leaders, and Congressional champions. This groundbreaking, bipartisan legislation established the framework for combating human trafficking and set new global standards for how governments can work together to prosecute traffickers, protect victims, and prevent the crime. Governments around the world came together the following month to adopt the UN TIP Protocol. This marked the start of a global anti-trafficking movement that has grown in both influence and determination over the past 25 years.

"The TVPA, the UN TIP Protocol, and the national and international anti-trafficking networks they engendered have had a remarkable impact in the fight against human trafficking since 2000. In the United States, the TVPA authorized the creation of the President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (PITF) to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts across the U.S. federal government. It also established the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons at the U.S. Department of State to work with governments around the world to combat this crime and to produce the annual Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP Report). Further legislative efforts led to the creation of the U.S. Advisory Council on Human Trafficking, a body composed of trafficking survivors that advises and makes recommendations on federal anti-trafficking policies to the PITF.

"Global understanding of human trafficking and the ways people are vulnerable to exploitation has evolved significantly over the last 25 years, thanks to the efforts of survivor leaders, civil society, international organizations, the private sector, and front-line workers. Most national and international laws, for example, now recognize that human trafficking does not require movement; human trafficking occurs as much within countries as between them. As this understanding has developed, the anti-trafficking movement has celebrated historic achievements that have strengthened governments and communities, protected lives and livelihoods, and held traffickers accountable."

Participating States Making Measurable Progress: Malta, Serbia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan

There were some changes in the last year in terms of Tier rankings of OSCE participating States. All were movements forward. This included Slovenia moving from Tier 2 to Tier 1,

Malta, Serbia, and Tajikistan moving from the Tier 2 Watchlist to Tier 2, and Turkmenistan moving from Tier 3 to the Tier 2 Watchlist.

Slovenia “made key achievements to do so during the reporting period; therefore, Slovenia was upgraded to Tier 1. These achievements included the government convicting traffickers for the first time in four years. Officials investigated more trafficking cases, and prosecuted labor trafficking crimes for the first time in four years. The government provided extensive anti-trafficking training to law enforcement officials, partnered with an international organization to draft procedures to identify trafficking victims among unaccompanied minors, and adopted an updated 2025-2026 NAP. Although the government meets the minimum standards, it identified fewer victims and initiated fewer prosecutions. Authorities regularly investigated and prosecuted trafficking crimes under non-trafficking statutes that carried lesser penalties, which weakened deterrence. The government did not identify child victims or victims among asylum-seekers, despite the risk of trafficking to these groups.”²

Malta “demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore, Malta was upgraded to Tier 2. These efforts included prosecuting more traffickers, including for the first time jointly with prosecutions for financial crimes; identifying and assisting more potential victims, including a Maltese national and a child asylum-seeker; and providing protection services to all identified victims. The government adopted a new national strategy and action plan and sought the input of survivors in its anti-trafficking efforts. The government amended the criminal code to increase protections for vulnerable witnesses when giving testimony and enacted regulations to extend some safeguards against exploitation to temporary workers. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government investigated fewer trafficking cases, and it did not convict any traffickers in 2024. Gaps in victim identification persisted and identification of Maltese and child victims and among asylum-seekers remained inadequate. The government has never awarded restitution or compensation to any trafficking victims.”³

Serbia “demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore, Serbia was upgraded to Tier 2. These efforts included convicting more traffickers and investigating government officials allegedly complicit in trafficking crimes. The government identified more victims, and the Center for Protection of Trafficking Victims (CPTV) adopted new SOPs for the identification, referral, and assistance of trafficking victims, which included the right for victims to appeal official identification decisions. The government allocated significantly more funding to CPTV, and for the first time, set aside funds for anti-trafficking NGOs providing most victim assistance efforts. However, the government did not

² <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/slovenia/>

³ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/malta/>

meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government prosecuted fewer alleged traffickers and continued to use crimes with more lenient penalties to prosecute traffickers. The government continued to lack proactive identification efforts and adequate screening procedures for victims among vulnerable populations and did not provide specialized support to child trafficking victims. Authorities continued to penalize victims with imprisonment, probation, and fines for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The government did not enter into partnerships with civil society to assist victim protection efforts. While CPTV screened and interviewed some victims at a Chinese-national owned factory, the government made little progress on an open investigation involving hundreds of foreign workers who faced forced labor conditions at a Chinese-national owned factory and mine.”⁴

Tajikistan “demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore, Tajikistan was upgraded to Tier 2. These efforts included identifying more trafficking victims, referring more identified victims to care, drafting a new anti-trafficking NAP, and increasing efforts to repatriate trafficking victims from abroad. Additionally, the government trained more officials and conducted awareness-raising activities on the ban on child labor in the cotton harvest for the first time in two years. The government-run National Trafficking in Persons Center assisted the highest number of trafficking victims since 2018. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government prosecuted and convicted fewer traffickers and did not report any criminal investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in human trafficking crimes. Additionally, observers reported allegations of officials mobilizing children in the annual cotton harvest, and there was a lack of oversight in sectors with forced labor risks.”⁵

Turkmenistan “does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government made key achievements during the reporting period, so Turkmenistan was upgraded to Tier 2 Watch List. While the government continued policies that perpetuated the mobilization of adults and children for forced labor in the 2024 cotton harvest, it amended Article 8 of the Labor Code to eliminate provisions that increased vulnerabilities to forced labor, added cotton picking and cotton growing to the list of hazardous work for children, and signed and implemented a new roadmap of cooperation with the International Labor Organization (ILO). Additionally, the government investigated, prosecuted, and convicted traffickers and identified trafficking victims for the first time in several years. It also established by presidential decree its Interdepartmental Commission on Combating Human Trafficking (the Commission) and adopted a new anti-trafficking NAP. Despite these achievements, the government did not hold any officials accountable for

⁴ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/serbia/>

⁵ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/tajikistan>

complicity in forced labor crimes, nor did it fund or provide any victim assistance. The government did not have SOPs for victim identification and referral, hindering overall protection efforts.”⁶

OSCE Participating States Remaining on Tier 3: Belarus and Russia

Two OSCE participating States have remained on Tier 3 for several years.

Belarus “does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. Belarus remained on Tier 3. During the reporting period there was a government policy or pattern of forced labor in government “labor therapy centers.” Authorities forced thousands of individuals with reported drug or alcohol addiction, as well as political prisoners, to perform a wide range of labor at “labor therapy centers;” reports indicated the government held at least 10,852 people in these centers in 2024. Despite this, the government took some steps to address trafficking, including supporting a child trafficking awareness campaign. However, the government did not report investigating or prosecuting trafficking cases, convicting any traffickers, or identifying any trafficking victims. Belarusian authorities facilitated the transfer of unaccompanied Ukrainian children to Belarus, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. Authorities continued to facilitate the entry into Belarus, and onward travel of, third-country nationals and asylum-seekers as part of a state-sponsored migration initiative that did not include screening for trafficking indicators. The government widely restricted the activities of civil society organizations, including organizations providing support to trafficking victims.”⁷

Russia also remained on Tier 3. “The Government of Russia does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. Russia remained on Tier 3. During the reporting period there was a government policy or pattern of trafficking of Ukrainian citizens and North Korean workers. Russia’s actions in the Russia-Ukraine war created millions of refugees and IDPs, who were highly vulnerable to trafficking. The government’s forcible transfer of tens of thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia, including by forcibly separating some children from their parents or guardians, significantly increased their vulnerability to trafficking. The Russian government operated a sprawling filtration operation and detention system that included the use of forced labor. The government did not report screening North Korean workers in Russia for trafficking indicators or identifying any North Korean trafficking victims, despite credible reports the DPRK operated

⁶ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/turkmenistan/>

⁷ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/belarus/>

work camps in Russia and exploited thousands of North Korean workers in forced labor. The government repatriated North Korean workers who attempted to escape, without screening them for trafficking indicators; these persons were highly vulnerable to forced labor and other grave harms, such as arrest, imprisonment, torture, or execution, upon return to the DPRK. Despite this, the government took some steps to address trafficking, including facilitating the return of Russian children from Syria, including potential trafficking victims. However, the government did not report investigating, prosecuting, or convicting any traffickers and did not report identifying any trafficking victims. Authorities continued to lack a process for victim identification and did not provide services for trafficking victims. Authorities routinely penalized victims and potential victims for unlawful acts committed solely as a direct result of being trafficked.”⁸

Conclusion

Instability in the region continues to pose a major challenge to our effort to prevent and combat human trafficking. We must act to ensure the safe return and reunification of Ukrainian children forcibly transferred by Russia with their families. And we must do all we can to ensure that post-conflict reconstruction efforts are free from trafficking and exploitation.

We also must step up our efforts to prevent and stop human trafficking for forced criminality in cyber scam centers and protect the survivors.

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.

⁸ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/russia/>