

THE PHILIPPINE EXPERIENCE IN THE INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS AND SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS, WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON PUNISHING THE TRAFFICKERS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Today, there are over eight million overseas Filipinos in 197 countries and territories, representing 10% of the total Philippine population. These are either regular migrants or temporary residents abroad whose stay overseas is employment-related and who are expected to return at the end of their work contracts. The majority of Filipinos living abroad are those who are temporary residents.

Filipino temporary residents abroad are either legal workers or irregular workers. At present, there are about 1.8 million Filipinos who are considered irregular workers. These are people who are not properly documented, people who do not have valid work permits, or people who are overstaying workers.

The increasing trend in Filipino migration is the result of surplus labour which cannot be absorbed by labour infrastructures in the country and the constant overseas demand for skilled Filipino labour. The advent of globalization, rapid advancement in technology and financial instruments, and the desire of Filipinos to go abroad opened up an opportunity for human trafficking syndicates to develop cross-border networks for exploitation.

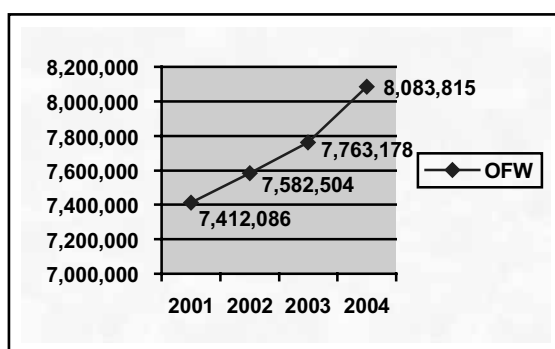
This presentation highlights the extent of the problem of human trafficking in the Philippines, the government initiatives taken to address the problem, and the projections for this transnational crime.

II. THE PHILIPPINE SITUATION

The Philippines is considered both as a source and destination country. It also serves as one of the major trans-shipment points for trafficked/smuggled persons to be sent to other countries.

A. The Philippines as a Source Country

Since the 1970s, the Philippines has been providing other countries with labour in various fields. As a result, there has been a consistent annual growth in the trend of Filipino migration. Consolidated reports coming from different government agencies reveal a 2% growth rate in overseas Filipinos from 7,412,086 in 2001 to 7,582,504 in 2002 to 7,763,178 in 2003. In 2004, the number of Filipino migrants jumped to 8,083,815.



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1. Top Countries of Destination

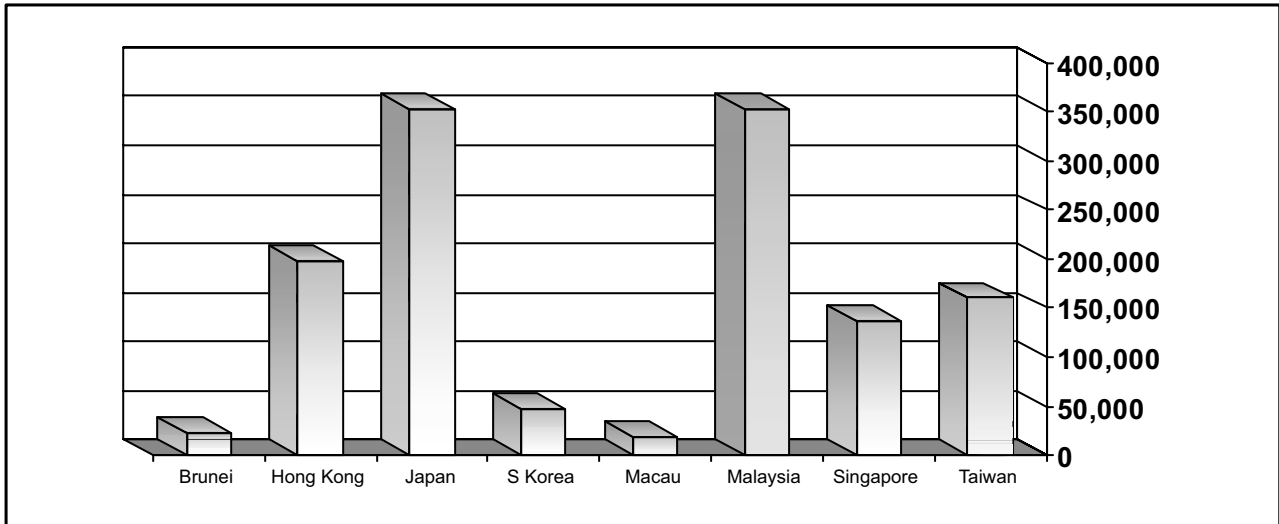
The Philippine Center on Transnational Crime (PCTC) has identified the top ten destinations of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs):

| | COUNTRY | TOTAL OVERSEAS FILIPINOS DEPLOYED |
|----|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | United States of America (USA) | 2,589,223 |
| 2 | Saudi Arabia | 966,572 |
| 3 | Malaysia | 422,910 |
| 4 | Canada | 392,120 |
| 5 | Japan | 353,253 |
| 6 | Australia | 212,656 |
| 7 | United Arab Emirates (UAE) | 193,144 |
| 8 | Hong Kong | 188,404 |
| 9 | Taiwan | 158,116 |
| 10 | Singapore | 130,263 |

2. Overseas Filipino Workers in Asia

| Stock Estimate of Overseas Filipinos (ASIA) | | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | Permanent | Temporary | Irregular | Total |
| Brunei | 26 | 21,762 | 1,700 | 23,488 |
| Hong Kong | 404 | 194,241 | 2,700 | 197,345 |
| Japan | 83,303 | 238,522 | 31,428 | 353,253 |
| S. Korea | 4,850 | 33,285 | 9,015 | 47,150 |
| Macau | 56 | 17,391 | 1,000 | 18,447 |
| Malaysia | 313 | 52,337 | 300,000 | 352,650 |
| Singapore | 152 | 64,337 | 72,000 | 136,489 |
| Taiwan | 2,037 | 154,135 | 4,500 | 160,672 |
| Others | 760 | 229,599 | 21,000 | 251,359 |
| Asia (S&E) Sub -Total | 91,901 | 1,005,609 | 443,343 | 1,540,853 |
| World Total | 3,187,586 | 3,599,257 | 1,296,972 | 8,083,815 |

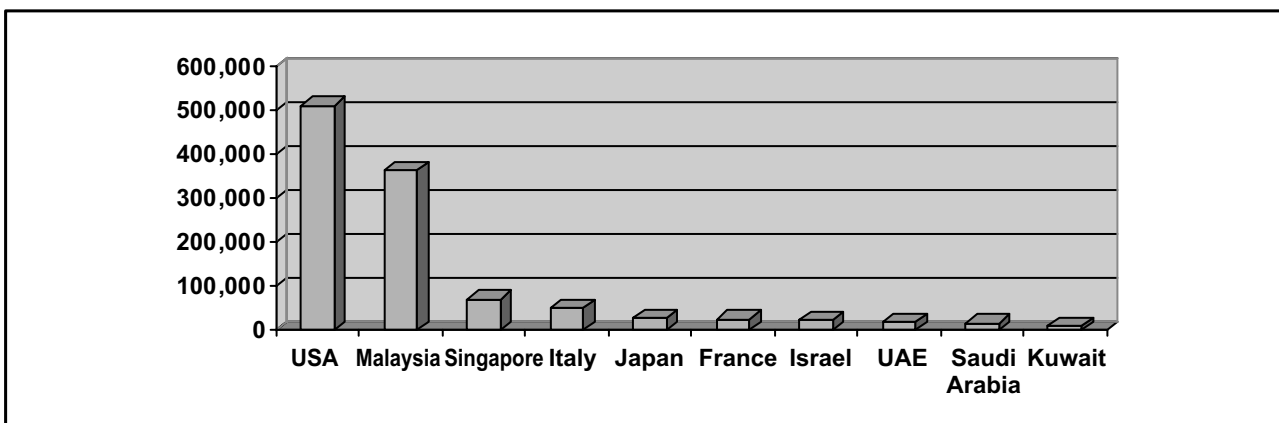
Reports show that 20% of the total overseas Filipino workers around the world are deployed in Asia. Records also indicate that a majority of Filipinos are deployed in Malaysia and Japan.



Meanwhile, the following are the top regions/continents of destination of undocumented Filipino workers:

| REGIONS OF DESTINATION | NUMBER OF UNDOCUMENTED FILIPINOS |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Americas and Trust Territories | 709,676 |
| 2. Asia (East and West) | 503,173 |
| 3. Asia (North) | 108,150 |
| 4. Europe | 143,810 |
| 5. Oceania | 31,001 |
| 6. Africa | 16,955 |

The preferred countries of destination of undocumented overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) are the following:



Within Asia, the top five countries with the highest numbers of irregular workers are the following: (1) Malaysia (2) Singapore (3) Japan (4) South Korea and (5) Taiwan. Malaysia recorded the most number of irregular workers with some 300,000 followed by Singapore with about 72,000. Malaysia is most attractive to human traffickers because of its proximity to the Philippines through Mindanao Island.

3. The Philippines as a Destination Country

Although the Philippines is largely considered a source country, it also attracts some foreigners to its shores. To date, there are 36,150 foreign nationals working and residing in the Philippines.

Because of its porous borders, human traffickers find it easy to bring their victims into the country. For years, the country has been identified as a destination for victims from the People's Republic of China (PRC), India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Russia and some central and eastern European countries.

As a related matter, confirmed intelligence reports show that undocumented foreign nationals are working in the country as illegal traders, entertainers and commercial sex workers. The Philippines is emerging as a favoured haven for foreign fugitives. There have been numerous arrests of fugitives within the Philippine jurisdiction.

4. The Philippines as a Trans-shipment Country

With the perception that border controls in the Philippines allow easier entry, trafficking syndicates use the country as a trans-shipment point. They usually utilize tourist visas or tampered documents to facilitate entry into the Philippines. After staying for some time in the country, victims are transported to more lucrative destination markets. Aside from using airports, syndicates also travel to the southern part of the country such as Zamboanga City, Tawi-Tawi, Davao City and Palawan to take advantage of the backdoor route to other countries.

III. MODUS OPERANDI

As observed in the last five years, human traffickers employ various dynamic modes in furtherance of their illicit trade. Identified modes of trafficking in persons are as follows:

A. Illegal Recruitment

This mode of trafficking is used by individuals posing as recruiters and projecting themselves as representatives or sales agents of a bogus recruitment agency authorized to recruit and deploy foreign workers to other countries.

A case in point is the trafficking of women to Malaysia. Victims are promised an expense-free recruitment process that includes air tickets, passport processing, placement fee and miscellaneous fees with the assurance that work permits will be issued at the country of destination. Once the victims are already transported, most are sold to prostitution dens and they begin to incur sky-rocketing debts leaving them no choice but to go out and render sexual services to customers (another way of forced prostitution) to pay said debts.

B. Illegal Migration

This is usually committed by organized crime groups victimizing Filipino nationals who desire to permanently live or work abroad. The syndicate is presumed to receive large sums of money from prospective recruits ranging from PHP60,000 to PHP300,000 (Philippine Pesos).

C. Mail Order Brides

This mode involves foreigners who are either married to Filipinos or those who have contacts here in the Philippines as prime recruiters. The recruiters target young, single and good-looking women who are then paired off with foreigners. Pictures of said women are published through travel and tour agencies and the Internet.

D. Foreign Training or Internship

This is a legitimate means of going out of the country but most people who avail of this programme refuse to return home and instead prolong their stay in a particular country to work with the hope of legitimizing their stay therein.

E. Religious Pilgrimage

This scheme victimizes mostly women who join groups for religious tours or pilgrimages and are promised employment by the traffickers upon arrival in the destination country. Some end up in bonded

labour while others are forced into prostitution.

F. Cultural Exchange/Promotion

This scheme projects a group posing as artists or singers who would enter a country of destination on a cultural exchange arrangement. After the performances, the group disbands and erstwhile members are deployed in unstable or insecure jobs. This arrangement is a form of exploitation, especially of women. Usually, the majority of these women end up in prostitution dens.

IV. ROUTES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Airports are still the preferred exit point of OFWs using tourist visas or tampered visas with the aid of organized crime groups. This is the reason why the Philippine government has strengthened screening processes at airports to detect fake and tampered travel documents.

Records indicate that organized criminal groups utilize several seaports as exit points for their illegally recruited or trafficked victims. Their victims are being brought to the southern Philippine City of Zamboanga as these organized crime groups prefer said city as their staging area. The victims are then made to exit through the 'back door' using the port of Zamboanga or via the Zamboanga-Bongao-Sandakan route using commercial passenger vessels. This is primarily because of the proximity of Mindanao to destinations in the south such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei.

A high number of victims are also transported using the Tawi-Tawi exit point to Sandakan, Malaysia via temper-type sea crafts. Government authorities have also monitored the Palawan area to be an emerging trans-shipment point for Filipinos trafficked towards the South. Moreover, Davao City is also used as an exit point for persons trafficked to Indonesia and other countries in Southeast Asia.

V. THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS ACT OF 2003 (REPUBLIC ACT NO. 9208)

Republic Act 9208 is a comprehensive law which seeks to institute policies to eliminate trafficking in persons, especially women and children, establish the necessary institutional mechanism for the protection and support of trafficked persons, and provide penalties for its violations. Salient features of the law are outlined below.

A. Defines Trafficking in Persons

Using the definition of trafficking in the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, as framework, the law defines trafficking in persons as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer or harbouring, or receipt of persons with or without the victim's consent or knowledge, within or across national borders by means of threat or use of force, or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of position, taking advantage of the vulnerability of the person, or, 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 or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery, servitude or the removal or sale of organs. The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall also be considered as "trafficking in persons" even if it does not involve any of the means set forth in the preceding paragraph."

B. Three Categories of Trafficking

The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003 punishes three categories of trafficking acts, enumerated below.

1. Acts of Trafficking in Persons

- (i) Recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring, providing or receiving a person by any means for the purposes of prostitution, pornography, sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, involuntary servitude or debt bondage;
- (ii) Introducing for money or other consideration, any Filipina to a foreigner as a possible spouse or to offer any Filipina to a foreigner as a prostitute;

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- (iii) Offering or contracting marriage for purposes of acquiring, buying, offering, selling or trading a person to engage in prostitution, or other acts of exploitation;
- (iv) Undertaking or organizing tour and travel plans consisting of tourism packages for purposes of utilizing or offering persons for prostitution, pornography or sexual exploitation;
- (v) Maintaining or hiring a person to engage in prostitution or pornography;
- (vi) Adopting or facilitating the adoption of persons for the purpose of prostitution, pornography, sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, involuntary servitude or debt bondage;
- (vii) Recruiting, hiring, adopting, transporting or abducting a person, by means of threat or use of force, fraud, deceit, violence, coercion or intimidation for the purpose of removal or sale of organs; or
- (viii) Recruiting, transporting or adopting a child to engage in armed activities in the Philippines or abroad.

2. Acts that Promote Trafficking in Persons

- (i) Knowingly leasing or subleasing property for trafficking purposes;
- (ii) Producing, printing, issuing or distributing unissued, tampered or fake counselling certificates, registration stickers and other certificates of government used for regulatory and pre-departure requirements for the purpose of promoting trafficking;
- (iii) Advertising, publishing, printing, broadcasting or distributing, by any means, any brochure, flyer, or any propaganda material that promotes trafficking;
- (iv) Facilitating, assisting or helping in the exit and entry of persons from/to the country at international or domestic airports, territorial boundaries and seaports who are in possession of unissued, tampered or fraudulent travel documents for the purpose of promoting trafficking; or
- (v) Confiscating, concealing, or destroying the passport, travel documents or belongings of trafficked persons, or preventing them from leaving the country or seeking redress from the government and appropriate agencies; or
- (vi) Knowingly benefiting, financially or otherwise, or making use of, the labour or services of a person held to a condition of involuntary servitude, forced labour or slavery.

3. Qualified Trafficking in Persons

Qualified trafficking is committed when:

- (i) The trafficked person is below 18 years of age;
- (ii) An adoption is effected through the Inter Country Adoption Law and the adoption is for prostitution, sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, involuntary servitude or debt bondage;
- (iii) The act is committed by a syndicate or on a large scale;
- (iv) The offender is an ascendant, parent, sibling, guardian or a person who exercises authority over the trafficked person, or when the offence is committed by a public officer or employee;
- (v) The trafficked person is recruited to engage in prostitution for any member of the military or law enforcement agencies;
- (vi) The offender is a member of the military or law enforcement agencies; or
- (vii) By reason or on occasion of the act of trafficking, the offended party dies, becomes insane, suffers mutilation or is afflicted with HIV or AIDS.

4. Penalties

| ACT | PENALTY |
|---|--|
| Qualified Trafficking in Persons | Life imprisonment and a fine of PHP 2 million to 5 million |
| Trafficking in Persons | 20 years imprisonment and a fine of PHP 1 million to 2 million |
| Promoting Trafficking in Persons | 15 years imprisonment and a fine of PHP 500 thousand to 1 million |
| Use of Trafficked Persons for Prostitution | First offence : 6 months community service and a fine of PHP 50,000.00 Subsequent offence: 1 year imprisonment and a fine of PHP 100,000.00 |

5. Trafficking in Persons must be distinguished from Human Smuggling

| TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS | HUMAN SMUGGLING |
|---|--|
| Usually involves coercion | Usually does not involve coercion |
| Characterized by subsequent exploitation after the illegal entry of a person into a foreign country | Characterized by facilitating, for a fee, the illegal entry of a person into a foreign country |
| Considered a human rights issue | Considered a migration concern |

**VI. GOVERNMENT AGENCIES MANDATED TO IMPLEMENT
THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS ACT**

The Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT), together with other relevant government agencies, are mandated to implement RA 9208. The IACAT is composed of the Secretary of the Department of Justice as Chairperson and the Secretary of the Social Welfare and Development as Co-Chairperson with the following as members: a) Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs; b) Secretary of Department of Labour and Employment; c) Administrator of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration; d) Commissioner of the Bureau of Immigration; e) Director-General of the Philippine National Police; f) Chairperson of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women; g) three representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who shall be composed of one representative each from among the sectors representing women, overseas Filipino workers and children.

A. Initiatives and Accomplishments

1. Policy Formulation

- Developed the National Strategic Plan of Action Against Trafficking.
- Formulated the guidelines for the establishment of the Inter-Agency Law Enforcement Task Force Against Trafficking. (Set-up task forces at airports, seaports and land-transportation terminals at NAIA, Zamboanga, Cebu, Davao, Leyte.)
- Developed a manual for prosecutors and law enforcers in investigating and prosecuting trafficking cases.

2. Co-ordination and Monitoring

- Established lines of co-ordination with various agencies and bodies dealing with the issue of trafficking in persons.
- Institutionalized consultative and co-ordinative mechanisms with NGOs.
- Continuously monitored trafficking cases and facilitated referral of cases to concerned agencies.

3. Information, Education and Communication

- Developed Standard Orientation Module on Trafficking in Persons.
- Printed and disseminated RA 9208 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations.
- Popularized the law and its Implementing Rules and Regulations.
- Conducted training for various stakeholders like law enforcers, public prosecutors, immigration officials and employees.
- Conducted roadshow campaign against trafficking in Zamboanga City, Tacloban City and Davao City.

B. Law Enforcement and Investigation

1. Philippine National Police (PNP)

- The PNP mainstreamed trafficking in persons in their Women and Children's Concerns Desks (WCCDs) nationwide. There are 1,782 desks nationwide with 2,182 police personnel.
- The Women and Children Complaint Division, Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) reported that it conducted four rescue operations that led to the arrest of 13 persons and the rescue of 12 minors. Cases were filed before the prosecutor's office.

2. National Bureau of Investigation (NBI)

The NBI created a specialized unit called Anti-Human Trafficking Division (AHTRAD), which investigated 55 cases from January 2004 to May 2005. Of the 55 cases, six were recommended for prosecution. These cases involve 63 persons. A further 22 cases are under investigation. AHTRAD investigated 57 cases of trafficking from January 2005 to October 2005. Of those, 32 cases are under investigation, six cases were recommended for prosecution, eight cases are subject to inquest proceedings and 11 cases were recommended for closure.

C. Prosecution (Department of Justice)

Department (DOJ) Circular No. 18 dated April 22 2005 provides guidelines on the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases and recommends giving preferential attention to trafficking cases, not dismissing trafficking cases on the mere account of an Affidavit of Desistance, and on the amount of bail for violations of the trafficking law (PHP10,000 per year of imprisonment except for Qualified Trafficking). It also recommends the designation of 95 trained Special Prosecutors to handle trafficking cases nationwide. The Department has also implemented training of 156 public prosecutors nationwide on RA 9208. (The number includes those prosecutors trained by NGOs and other entities nationwide). The DOJ Task Force on Trafficking in Persons received 14 cases for preliminary investigation and 13 cases for inquest proceedings:

- Of the 14 cases for preliminary investigation, four cases have been filed in court, five are pending investigation, four were dismissed;
- Of the 13 cases for inquest, three cases have been filed in court, five have been filed for further investigation, four cases were dismissed.

Of other trafficking-related cases, 71 cases for violation of the Philippine Passport Act of 1996 (RA 8239) resulted in conviction.

D. National Strategic Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons (2004 – 2010)

The National Strategic Action Plan is a six-year plan of action that will serve as the blueprint for government, non-government organizations and other stake holders' action against trafficking in persons. Its vision is "a just, humane, gender-fair and empowered society that protects its people, especially women and children, from all forms of exploitation, thus enabling them to fully exercise their rights, realize their potentials in the development of the country, and experience a happy and peaceful family life."

1. Goal and Objectives

Towards this vision, the Council shall undertake measures to prevent and suppress trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and to ensure their recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration into mainstream society. The council has likewise identified the following objectives: promote public awareness of trafficking in persons and sustain collective and co-ordinated advocacy efforts; co-ordinate the maximum effective and efficient implementation of the law; mobilize and forge partnerships and co-operation among different agencies involved in the areas of prevention, protection, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of trafficking; establish and institutionalize an effective and efficient referral and tracking system of incidents of trafficking through all the stages of intervention; and institutionalize a central database and a shared information system on trafficking.

2. Strategies

The National Strategic Action Plan will drive the work programme and associated prioritizing and budgetary processes of the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking in Persons (IACAT) into 2010. In order to attain its objectives, the Council shall pursue the following strategies:

- Advocacy and Social Mobilization
- Capability Building
- Data Collection and Management
- Alliance Building and Networking
- Research, Policy Studies and Documentation
- Institutional Mechanisms.

3. Components

This strategic plan of Action has three major components: prevention, protection, rehabilitation and reintegration, with objectives and a set of strategic activities under each component. Each component adopts all of the strategies mentioned.

VII. US STATE DEPARTMENT ANNUAL REPORT ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

On June 3 2005, the US State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons released its 2005 TIP's Report placing the Philippines in the Tier 2 Watch List Category. Countries included under the said category are those whose governments do not fully comply with the standards of the US Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.

Based on the said report, the Philippines remained on the Tier 2 Watch List primarily due to the country's failure to show evidence of increasing efforts to convict traffickers. The report says that while the government made increasing efforts to implement the Anti-Trafficking Act, the number of trafficking related prosecutions remained low and that no convictions were reported for Anti-Trafficking Act violations. While we do not deny the problem of trafficking in persons in the country, the US Report failed to consider and appreciate the significant efforts made by the country through the number of member agencies of the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) and its partner agencies and organizations, especially in the areas of law enforcement and prosecution.

This year, the US removed the Philippines from its trafficking in persons Watch List because of the Philippines' progress in fighting modern slavery, including forced prostitution, sex trafficking and child labour. The US State Department's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* moves the Philippines up a tier from its Watch List of problem nations, to one that is making significant efforts to combat trafficking.

The report congratulated the Philippines for last year's improvements, saying the government has stepped up its effort to implement its anti-trafficking law and made initial progress in implementing strategies to combat trafficking in persons, particularly in prosecuting human traffickers.

The 2006 report noted that the Department of Justice tripled the number of prosecutors, resulting in a fourfold increase in cases presented for prosecution.

VIII. ACTUAL CASES

A. Case 1: People of the Philippines vs. Hadja Jarma Lalli, et.al.

Facts:

Sometime on June 3 2005, the accused recruited a certain Lolita Plando, a 23 year old, single woman from Zamboanga City, as restaurant entertainer. On June 6 2006 she left the port of Zamboanga City for Sandakan, Malaysia. She was brought to a restaurant in Labuan, Malaysia which turned out to be a prostitution den. Prostitutes were paid MYR300 (Malaysian Ringgits) for short time service of which MYR50 went to the entertainer, and MYR500 for over night service of which MYR100 went to the entertainer.

Lolita worked at Piper Club from June 14 to July 8, 2005. She had at least one customer a night and at most she had around five customers a night. On July 9 2005 she was lucky to contact her brother-in-law, an Indonesian national, who helped her escape and brought her back to Zamboanga City.

After filing the complaint, the police apprehended the accused this case. After a full-blown trial which lasted only for four months the court sentenced the accused to life imprisonment and a fine of PHP2,000,000 for the crime of trafficking in persons and the penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of PHP500,000 for the crime of illegal recruitment and to pay the offended party Lolita Plando jointly and severally the sum of PHP50,000 as moral damages and PHP50,000 as exemplary damages.

B. Case 2: People of the Philippines vs. Alice Tongco, et.al.

Facts:

From October 2003 – January 2004, four women, two of whom were minors, were recruited from Cebu City by the accused, a couple, and brought to Manila with promised employment as movie actresses and

singers but instead they were peddled to men on several occasions for sexual pleasure in consideration of an average amount of PHP10,000 or engaged in prostitution. They were given half of the amount paid by male customers. The accused were arrested by National Bureau of Investigation agents assigned at the Violence Against Women and Children Division after conducting a surveillance and entrapment operation.

After a full-blown trial, judgments were rendered against the accused and the court sentenced each to life imprisonment and to pay a fine of PHP2,000,000 (on four counts) and the accused were ordered to pay jointly and severally each of the four complainants moral damages in the amount of PHP50,000.

C. Case 3: PP vs. Rosalyn Dumot

Facts:

Sometime in the early part of the year 2005, women from Davao Del Norte, mostly under eighteen years old, were recruited to work as sales girls in Brunei. But instead they were exploited. They were confined in a closed and guarded room and forced into prostitution by their employers in Labuan, Malaysia. Two recruits luckily escaped through the help of their customers who felt pity for their ordeal. They successfully returned to Davao Del Norte in the Philippines and filed a formal complaint against their recruiters. After preliminary investigation, warrants of arrest were issued by the court against the accused. Assistance was being sought for those left in Labuan, Malaysia. When this matter came to my attention, I immediately contacted a Malaysian friend to see if he could be of help. He immediately flew to Malaysia and through his connections there, he was able to bring the women back to Manila.

IX. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Because of the consistent demand for skilled Filipino labour, we foresee that cases of human trafficking and smuggling will persist. Many Filipinos believe that working abroad will provide them with better opportunities. Their vulnerability and ambitions of going abroad will continue to open up chances for organized crime syndicates to operate.

Nevertheless, the Philippines will continue to intensify co-operation among nations to combat human trafficking. This does not only mean strengthening law enforcement and prosecution efforts but involves implementation of appropriate political, economic and social measures as well. The Philippine Government will also continue to give high priority to intensifying relations with other nations as it continually seeks to promote co-operation, strengthening its ties to tighten security measures at ports and improving enforcement and intelligence exchange.

It is only in intensifying regional co-operation in the area of law enforcement and prosecution that we will be successfully liberated from this international scourge. No country or region in the world is exempt from the scourge of trafficking. Thus, there is a need to harmonize legislation in the region to criminalize all forms of human trafficking in order to eliminate havens for the illegal activities of human traffickers.

There is also a need to further develop regional capacity-building programmes to enhance existing capabilities of all countries in the region to monitor, detect and investigate transnational crime activities.

The challenge of addressing and managing the threats of human trafficking certainly requires determined actions and solutions. Extensive and intensive forging of agreements to strengthen regional and international co-operation and linkages should include but not be limited to mutual legal assistance, extradition, mutual assistance in criminal matters, sharing of information, law enforcement and prosecutorial co-operation.

The evils of human trafficking can only be eradicated through our joint and sustained efforts on all fronts. Whether on the national, regional or global level, we should put our resources together and engage each other constructively in effecting long-term solutions to this global menace.