



**Testimony of
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**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs
On
Combatting Forced Labor and Modern Day Slavery in East Asia and
Pacific
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this important hearing and inviting World Vision to testify. You and Senator Rubio are leaders in the fight against forced labor, human trafficking, and modern day slavery. We are especially grateful that you have championed programs for the protection of vulnerable children. Children around the world are alive, and contributing to their communities and countries, because of these programs. Your efforts have led to an increased U.S. focus on displaced children, orphans, children affected by armed conflict, and children trafficked for sex or labor. Thanks to your tireless efforts, America remains a global leader in combatting these and other critical issues that impact and endanger children. This hearing is an opportunity to shine a light on what is happening in East Asia and the Pacific and discuss how the U.S. can strengthen its leadership role.

World Vision is a Christian relief, development, and advocacy organization serving millions of children and families in nearly 100 countries. Our 45,000 employees are dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities to tackle the root causes of poverty and injustice. This work includes emergency relief and preparedness for people impacted by natural disasters and armed conflict; long-term economic development; preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children; mobilizing children, youth and local communities to hold their governments accountable; and advocating for effective systems, laws, and policies that provide a safety net and protection for vulnerable populations where the social fabric is especially weak.

World Vision U.S. has more than one million private donors in every state and Congressional district, partners with over 16,000 churches in the United States, and works with corporations and foundations. We are part of the global federation of World Vision International, which last year implemented more than \$2.6 billion in programming to help children and communities through international relief, development, and advocacy assistance. Although private donors support much of our work, the U.S. Government is an invaluable partner. We leverage this partnership to reach many more children at-risk and ensure that the precious resources of the American taxpayer are prudently used to promote and protect the well-being of children and communities abroad.

World Vision has been asked to testify about our experience preventing and responding to forced labor and human trafficking in East Asia. Our testimony will focus on the U.S. role in combatting forced labor and human trafficking in the region; the importance of the State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report in addressing human trafficking in the region; what the 2014 tier placements in the Trafficking in Persons Report mean for the listed countries and the U.S.; and the impact of programs (U.S. funded and non-U.S. funded) and funding that aim to prevent these crimes. East Asian countries are a vital and increasingly influential component to the global economy. Yet the region is also home to large pockets of the poorest and most vulnerable people on Earth. The opportunity is now, and tools are available, to make U.S. engagement and funding more coordinated, effective, and efficient. Together with partners in East Asia, we can ensure that the region's growth is built on the strengths of the people, not on their backs through bondage.

According to the International Labor Organization, forced labor and human trafficking is a \$150 billion industry. Most media and governmental attention to human trafficking focuses on sex trafficking. However, labor trafficking ensnares more people and makes more money. This is true in East Asian countries like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

As in other countries, including America, forced labor and human trafficking take on many forms in East Asia. We see children exploited as child soldiers, working in brick kilns, agriculture, construction, the fishing industry, and forced to be domestic servants. All of these countries have laws that address human trafficking and fight labor exploitation to varying degrees. As in other countries -including

America- there is a disconnect between national laws on forced labor and human trafficking and local level implementation and awareness of those laws. In fact, most laws focus on sex trafficking and often leave labor trafficking as a neglected priority at the national and local level. As a result, the level of impunity is high and the chances of justice for survivors is often low. There is often little reason for employers and traffickers to clean up their act. Furthermore, there are multiple root causes for forced labor and trafficking including household income levels, lack of education, issues of land tenure, and an increasing demand for cheap, unskilled labor. Every story is different. They still all point to how governments, civil society, and communities can do better to end modern day slavery.

In East Asia, migration, within and outside a country's border, is a common factor for many of the children whom we work with. The nature of the global market place is producing many opportunities to make money in a few East Asian nations but is also creating more ways to exploit a person for their labor. What's more, economic growth in countries like Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia has not been matched in countries like Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam. This creates a strong demand for low-skilled labor that cannot be met by the local population. As a result, a steady supply of cheap, and often exploitable, labor moves from one country to another or from rural areas to urban centers. It is nearly impossible to address the issue of forced labor and human trafficking in the region without talking about migration. We have seen families in communities where we work in Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines torn apart by high amounts of debt that they take on to pay the fees that unscrupulous employment agencies often require to secure a job abroad. These jobs are often not what was promised and can lead to the dark hole of debt bondage. Understanding and addressing the push and pull factors towards unsafe migration are critical to preventing and responding to vulnerability.

Let me share the story of Min Min, who has benefited from one of our programs in Myanmar. As the eldest son from a poor family in Myanmar, Min Min felt the pressure to help his family earn money and survive. He befriended a man who came to his village and told him he could get work in Thailand. When Min Min arrived in Thailand by boat, he was immediately sold to an Indonesian fishing vessel. He describes his ordeal as nothing short of hell. He was forced to work all night and most of the day for seven days a week. He says he watched his captures torture or kill anyone who tried to escape. For nine years, Min Min

toiled on the boat until finally, one night, desperate to escape, he slipped off the boat and swam to shore. He found himself in Indonesia with no food, shoes, nor clothes. He made it to a small village but with no visa or identity documents there was little that the villagers could do for him. Min Min was finally able to call his family who contacted World Vision. We worked with the Myanmar government to get him back home and end his ordeal. World Vision's End Trafficking in Persons Program (ETIP) provides direct assistance to trafficking survivors like Min Min to fully recover from the trafficking harm and reintegrate into life in society.

Min min's story illustrates where so much can go wrong and what can be done to help prepare migrants for what they might face when they leave home to work. In Myanmar, Vietnam, and Laos, we've worked with scores of children who were promised a job either in another city or another country only to find a situation that was nothing like they were promised and were forced into a situation where they are denied even the most basic human dignity. Cases like these have led World Vision to spend a great deal of effort educating communities and especially children aged 15-17 (those most likely to take a job) on the dangers of risky migration and the proactive steps they can take to prevent themselves from becoming victims. Throughout Southeast Asia, World Vision runs youth clubs that follow a toolkit composed of safe migration and trafficking prevention skills and information. Youth participants receive a pocket guide in local languages called the "Smart Navigator Booklet", developed by World Vision's ETIP Program. This small, easy to understand booklet covers what human trafficking is; provides checklists for ensuring safe travel including keeping all identification documents with you; includes warnings against borrowing money or placing yourself in debt to your employer; and what to do if you think you've been trafficked including anti-trafficking hotlines in every country in East Asia. It even includes basic instructions on how to make an international phone call. These simple yet effective steps come from having seen so many stories like Min Min's when migrating to earn money goes wrong.

None of what is mentioned above should be considered new. Details about the dangers of unsafe migration and trafficking, and countless other insights, fill the pages of the U.S. State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. The TIP Report serves as an invaluable tool in the US diplomatic toolbox to combat human trafficking. The Report is a critical resource to organizations like World Vision and (though they may be loath to admit it) governments around the

world. Whether country governments denounce the TIP Report, and bristle or rejoice in their rankings, the TIP Report is a key driver for national change. The findings and recommendations listed in country narratives often inform the development of governments' laws and National Action Plans (NAP) to combat trafficking. These plans provide a guide for what governments need to do in order to strengthen their efforts, and NGOs like World Vision with a roadmap that shows a government's priorities. These action plans create an opening to work alongside governments to accomplish their goals. For example, after continued engagement from the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Children in Armed Conflict and consistent pressure from the TIP Report, in 2012, the Myanmar government and the Country Task Force for Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR – of which World Vision is a member) created a Joint Action Plan to cease the recruitment and use of child soldiers in the national army. To date, 273 children have been demobilized though hundreds more suspected cases have yet to be addressed.

Once a NAP is in place, it is a vital tool that holds the implementing government accountable and shows where the successes shine and gaps remain. The National Action Plans in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, and Vietnam came after recommendations from the TIP Report with additional engagement from the US Embassies and the United Nations. In Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam, the government has made concerted efforts to include local and international organizations into the implementation of the action plans, again in part as a result from TIP Report recommendations.

The response of governments in the region often focuses on national efforts, as opposed to implementation at the local level. Our ETIP program in the region convenes trafficking survivors who provide recommendations to government officials on such things as how to get quick access to identification documents for survivors returning from abroad. While these conversations influence discussions within the capital, slower implementation due to lack of local government awareness, capacity, and funding often hinders the effectiveness of the changes that come about. Yet awareness at the local level is starting to grow as a direct result of findings from the TIP Report and State Department engagement. Myanmar has made strong efforts to increase awareness of human trafficking across the country. These efforts include a National Anti-Trafficking Day; partnering with MTV Exit and other partners to host concerts and informational events for young people; setting up billboards with hotline numbers; broadcasting and publishing public service announcements on TV, radio, and daily newspapers,

and expanding the government's Anti-Trafficking Division to start reaching out to more rural areas. As the TIP Report points out, the government of Myanmar still has work to do and Myanmar remains on the Tier 2 Watchlist. We are, however, seeing progress as a result of the continuing conversations generated in part through the TIP Report.

It is critical to point out that governments cannot make progress alone. There is no single intervention or effort that alone can defeat the use of forced labor and human trafficking in the long term. World Vision programs are most successful when we take a multi-faceted, multi-sector approach to combatting exploitation.

Often times, the most effective efforts seemingly have nothing to do with forced labor but in fact are aimed at strengthening the formal (governmental) and informal (community-based) systems of protection that form a complete safety net for parents and children. For example, World Vision implements the Cambodians EXCEL (Eliminating eXploitive Child Labor through Education and Livelihoods). Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Cambodians EXCEL reaches 28,000 children working in fishing, agriculture, domestic servitude, and other sectors. Child labor in Cambodia results from factors like poverty, lack of access to quality education, cultural acceptance of child labor, debt, migration, and lack of regulation in the informal sector, particularly in subsistence farming and fishing. The program aims to remove kids from dangerous or exploitative working conditions and get them back to school through tutoring and catch-up classes.

The focus on education is particularly important. World Vision research found that the higher the literacy level of a child, the more aware they are of human trafficking. World Vision and our local partners then work with children's parents to increase and diversify household income and to provide safe options for saving and obtaining credit. Access to income and credit reduces the incentive to remove a child from school and send him or her to work. This also keeps families out of debt and makes them less likely to migrate to find work or place their kids into a risky situations. A World Vision project in the Philippines – a model for the Cambodian project and also funded by U.S. Department of Labor – uses a similar approach that has removed over 70,000 children out of the worst forms of child labor or prevented them from even being subjected to this labor.

World Vision also focuses on another key factor that most people take for granted: birth registration. Human traffickers pursue individuals who are

vulnerable and powerless. Without a birth certificate, children are an especially easy target.

According to UNICEF, every year 51 million children are never registered at birth, leaving them without an official name or nationality. There are an estimated 135 million unregistered children in East Asia alone. Children without a birth certificate are denied basic opportunities and their lives read like a checklist to human traffickers: poor, no education, unable to access safe credit, separated from family with no identification, and unable to verify their age. Lack of age verification makes forced marriage easier.

Birth registration impacts all aspects of a child's well-being. A birth certificate helps protect children from human trafficking, child labor, early marriage, underage recruitment, and conscription into military service. If a child is abused, neglected, exploited, or exposed to violence, a birth certificate ensures his or her access to services and justice systems. It is also critical for obtaining identity documents needed for trans-border migration for work. It is therefore unsurprising to see that 80% of children in Vietnam, which has almost universal birth registration at 99%, are more aware of the need to travel with identity documents. By comparison, only 60% of children in Burma, which has an 81% registration rate, have such awareness. WV is partnering with Plan International and the UN in organizing the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in the Asia and Pacific in November 2014. This is an opportunity to raise awareness and generate governmental action on what is the foundation for the protection and well-being of children.

The U.S. Government has multiple options for partnering with East Asian governments and civil societies to strengthen the overall response to these crimes and prevent them from happening in the first place. In addition to the diplomatic tool of the TIP Report, the U.S. Government has tools to build on the recommendations of the TIP Report with strategic, bi-lateral partnerships in focus countries. For instance, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2013 included the key provisions of the Child Protection Compact Act (CPCA). This allows the State Department to partner with a government and set measurable goals over a multi-year period to strengthen the protection system for vulnerable children and improve justice systems so they investigate and prosecute those who would exploit a child. This is an exciting opportunity for sustained engagement of the US Government on these issues and we're looking forward to the State Department launching this effort.

Another opportunity lies with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). In 2012, USAID unveiled the agency's Counter Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) Policy. In 2013, they released a field guide for USAID missions to assist in the implementation of the policy. One of the programming objectives calls for AID to begin integrating CTIP efforts into larger programming sectors such as agriculture, health, economic growth, education, and humanitarian assistance. This will allow for an increase in anti-trafficking efforts that take the multi-faceted approach that is proving effective at targeting the root causes of vulnerability. Furthermore, another programming objective of the CTIP policy is specific CTIP investments in what AID calls "Critical TIP Challenge Countries." These are countries that have global strategic importance yet have significant trafficking problems. Of particular focus are countries that have spent several years on the Tier 2 Watchlist or Tier 3 of the TIP Report. This creates opportunities for impactful engagement with several countries in East Asia.

Finally, further opportunities exist in the Action Plan for Children in Adversity (APCA). Launched in 2012, the Action Plan unites and aligns 30 offices in seven U.S. Government agencies around the same measurable, achievable goals for international programs relating to vulnerable children. The three main objectives are **strong beginnings** (ensuring children meet early childhood development milestones), **family care first** (making sure every child is in a safe family environment), and **stronger prevention and response** to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The Action Plan, currently coordinated by USAID, enables U.S. Government agencies to coordinate their efforts to make U.S. programs more effective and efficient. The selection of the first focus countries will provide an opportunity to show how coordinated and multifaceted programs can collectively contribute to reducing the vulnerability of children.

These tools allow for constructive and coordinated bi-lateral engagement that will enable countries to develop and expand the systems of prevention, protection, and prosecution, and ideally address many of the root causes of trafficking in the region. With the right engagement and approaches, we can mitigate trafficking and eliminate it as much as it possible.

Recommendations

- Encourage the Administration to use bilateral tools like the Action Plan for Children in Adversity and Child Protection Compact Act that foster collaboration, sustainably strengthening systems, and measurable results.
- Support current U.S. Government birth registration efforts by introducing and passing the Girls Count Act in the Senate and urge the US Government to support the implementation of East Asia Ministerial Plan of Action (2015 – 2024) that will be finalized during the Ministerial Conference in November 2014.
- Encourage USAID to further roll out their Counter-Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) policy which calls for integrating anti-trafficking efforts into other programs like economic development, emergency response, health, and education, and other steps and makes augmented investments in TIP Challenge Countries.

Congress has given the Administration good tools. It is critical that we work together so these tools are used and not left to rust in the toolbox. Thank you again for holding this hearing and for all the work you continue to do in the fight against forced labor and human trafficking. World Vision is committed to working with the Subcommittee on these critical issues and I look forward to answering your questions.

World Vision Testimony: Combatting Forced Labor and Modern Day Slavery in East Asia

