



# House Dems press Obama on human trafficking decision

By Vicki Needham - 08/06/15 05:39 PM EDT

Three House Democrats are pushing the Obama administration to provide a fuller explanation of why Malaysia's human trafficking status was upgraded.

Reps. Keith Ellison (Minn.), Rosa DeLauro (Conn.) and Mark Pocan (Wis.) **sent a letter** on Thursday to President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry requesting further clarification about Malaysia's promotion in the latest Trafficking in Persons report, which was released late last month.

They asked for a more detailed analysis as to what State considered "significant efforts" made by Malaysia to merit the upgrading of its status to the Tier 2 Watch List from Tier 3, the lowest level in the report.

"Malaysia's upgrade to the Tier II Watch List, attributed in large part to increased investigations and prosecutions of trafficking cases does not add up," the lawmakers **wrote**.

Congressional lawmakers and human rights groups had urged State officials ahead of the report to keep Malaysia on Tier 3. They have argued the upgrade gives Malaysia a smaller hurdle to remain part of the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

As part of the trade promotion authority law, Congress barred fast-track for any trade agreements that reach Capitol Hill and include a Tier 3 nation, throwing up a potential hurdle for passage of a deal.

Earlier Thursday, members from both parties on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee accused the State Department of prioritizing trade goals over victims of human trafficking.

In turn, they threatened to subpoena all documents tracking the agency's analysis.

Kerry denied that politics played a role in the upgrade.

"I personally signed off on it," Kerry said Thursday in Malaysia.

"And I had zero conversation with anybody in the administration about the Trans-Pacific Partnership relative to this decision — zero," Kerry told reporters following a meeting with Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak.

Kerry said the decision was based on the recommendation of his team that Malaysia is making strides to combat human trafficking.

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