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## U.S. Congress to seek more transparency in human trafficking report

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WASHINGTON - A U.S. Senate committee may draft legislation seeking to add more transparency to the State Department's annual human trafficking report following concerns it had been watered down for political reasons, a senior lawmaker said on Thursday.

Senator Bob Corker, Republican chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations panel, said lawmakers remained concerned over the credibility of the report and whether politics trumped human rights in this year's rankings of strategically important countries such as Malaysia and Cuba. (<http://1.usa.gov/113GLxb>)

Corker and Senator Ben Cardin, the panel's ranking Democrat, both expressed concerns after a closed-door hearing between the Senate Foreign Relations panel and Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken to discuss the Trafficking in Persons report.

"I think what you are going to see happen is likely a legislative push to create some transparency around countries being upgraded so we understand what the dynamic is," Corker said after the meeting.

Malaysia's upgrade from the lowest tier on the list of worst human trafficking centers could smooth the way for an ambitious U.S.-led free-trade deal with the Southeast Asian nation and 11 other countries by removing a potential barrier to President Barack Obama's signature global trade deal.

A provision in a related trade bill passed by Congress this year had barred from fast-tracked trade deals Malaysia and other countries that earn the worst U.S. human trafficking ranking in the eyes of the U.S. State Department.

"Nothing was put forth to alleviate those concerns in any way. As a matter of fact, I would say that most people left there with even greater concerns," Corker said.

Mai Shiozaki, a spokeswoman in the State Department's office that produces the trafficking report, said Blinken "had a productive discussion with senators and appreciated the opportunity to lay out the facts and rationale behind this year's report."