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Rating the World's Efforts to Fight Human Trafficking

## **As State Dept.'s Annual TIP Report Approaches, House Panel Hears from Human Rights Groups About Impact of TIP Rankings**

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WASHINGTON, April 23, 2015 /[Standard Newswire](#)/ -- The U.S. State Department's main effort to combat human trafficking was the main focus of a hearing held yesterday by U.S. Rep. Chris Smith (NJ-04), Chairman of the House congressional panel that oversees global human rights issues, and author of the landmark Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), a law which mandates the State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP).

The hearing, dubbed "Accountability and Transformation: Tier Rankings in the Fight Against Human Trafficking," was held before the House Foreign Affairs Committee subcommittee on global human rights. Smith disputed China's 2014 upgrade from Tier 3 to the Tier 2 Watch List, and discussed numerous human trafficking issues, including recent media reports of Burmese slaves on fishing boats.

Smith stated his concerns that China fooled the State Department—which seemed to believe that China was abolishing its re-education through labor camps, rather than simply renaming the camps and continuing the practice.

"The Congressional-Executive China Commission reported that in 2013, Chinese authorities increasingly used other forms of arbitrary and administrative detention such as Legal Education Centers, Custody and Education Centers, 'black jails,' and compulsory drug detoxification centers," said Smith. "Moreover, the Commission reported that in November 2014, the Deputy Director of China's Ministry of Justice said at a press conference that the 'vast majority' of China's [reeducation through labor] facilities have been converted to compulsory drug detox centers. The China Commission believes that these compulsory drug detox centers force detainees to do labor, as do the Custody and Education Centers. If true—and I believe it is—then the Chinese government is directly involved in human trafficking and profiting from it."

The 2015 TIP report currently being finalized and expected to be released soon was discussed by witnesses Mark Lagon, President of [Freedom House](#) and Former Ambassador-at-Large for Trafficking in Persons Office at the U.S. Department of State; Matt Smith, Executive Director of the human rights group, [Fortify Rights](#); the Rev. Shay Cullen, President/Chief Executive Officer, the [PREDA](#) (People's Recovery, Empowerment and Developmental Assistance) Foundation, an organization dedicated to freeing children and women from sexual slavery in the Philippines.

Ambassador Lagon said the TIP Report's tier rankings, the TVPA and its reauthorizations have made a difference.

"Seriously researched and credible reports assessing the performance of governments in protecting the dignity of those living and working in their borders have a demonstrable impact," Lagon said. "The history of the TIP Report shows it has focused the minds of governments on change. Instead of stigma falling upon the victims of human trafficking, including in migrant labor and the sex industry, it places constructive stigma on those governments not doing enough to prevent their victimization, to assist them, and to hold their tormenters to account. Freedom House knows that well-documented reports giving grades to nations (including the United States and other Western states), like its Freedom in the World survey has for 43 years, gets the attention of authorities." [Click here to read Lagon's testimony.](#)

Rev. Cullen testified that some of these small children are victims of human trafficking brought into the city to beg for organized criminal syndicates or to be exploited as drug couriers.

"The human trafficking of youth and children for sexual exploitation some as young as 18 months old to 14-year-old are procured for pedophiles, video making and for commercial sexual exploitation in sex bars where they are exploited by sex tourists some being U.S. Nationals," Cullen said. [Click here to read Cullen's testimony.](#)

Matt Smith of Fortify Rights said the annual TIP Report and tier-ranking system demonstrates how impactful legislation can contribute to the realization of fundamental human rights worldwide.

"Officials from governments throughout Southeast Asia have told us it is a priority for them to combat human trafficking as a direct result of the annual TIP report and tier-ranking system. This is a monumental achievement," Matt Smith said. [Click here to read his statement.](#)

"We also need to look at ourselves, and ask too whether we are complicit in abetting trafficking, perhaps unwittingly," Smith said, referencing an Associated Press investigation that documented Thai boats picking-up seafood in Indonesia that is caught by Burmese slaves who, when not at sea, are kept in cages on remote Indonesian islands. The seafood is believed to have been taken back to Thai ports, processed and ultimately bought by unknowing consumers around the world, including in the U.S.

"Much of the tainted seafood may have entered the supply chain to reach the shelves of American grocery stores and, through vendors such as Sysco, have landed on the plates of our service men and women," Smith said.

Smith directly addressed those who think that the American TIP reports embarrasses allies and undercuts efforts to cultivate friendly ties around the globe.

"Two of our closest allies, Israel and South Korea, at one point were both on Tier 3, the worst rank," Smith said. "I remember meeting with their Ambassadors who had files demonstrating to all of us and anyone who would listen the measures they were taking to mitigate this terrible crime. And both of those countries got off Tier 3 when they backed words with substantive action. Rather than alienating them, the exercise underscored that friends watch out for each

other, and that we must call upon our friends to live up to the high ideals they profess." [Click here to read Chairman Smith's opening statement.](#)