

Human Trafficking in Honduras

Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The purpose of this report is to discuss the status of human rights in the Republic of Honduras (Honduras) for the 2020 Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. The U.S. State Department's 2019 Traffic in Persons report currently lists Honduras as a "Tier 2" Country¹. According to the report, Tier 2 countries are ones whose "governments do not fully meet the TVPA's (Trafficking Victims Protection Act) minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards"².

3. Honduras primarily serves as a source and transit country for labor and sex trafficking. Women and children are taken out of the country to be exploited in neighboring countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Belize. Those women and children trafficked are then often exploited sexually, used in drug transportation by cartels, or used for forced labor abroad³.

4. On average, over the past 5 years an estimated 265,000 people per year attempt to migrate from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras due to violence and poor economic situations⁴. These immigrants, especially women and children, are then exploited and used for sex and drug trafficking⁵. In one particular case, a Honduran woman paid a man to help her and her kids reach the United States. When she reached Mexico she no longer had any money to continue the journey and was then sold into prostitution. Sadly, she is not the only one, and in fact, she and other girls, some as young as 14, were forced to comply or be killed⁶.

4. During the previous UPR, numerous countries raised concern over the trafficking of humans, particularly of women and children, which was occurring in Honduras. They asked that Honduras "[a]dopt measures to combat trafficking in persons, particularly women and children"⁷. They recommended that Honduras "[c]ontinue to work on combatting trafficking in human beings

¹ *Trafficking in Persons Report June 2019*, United States State Department (2019), available at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019-Trafficking-in-Persons-Report.pdf>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Central America's Turbulent Northern Triangle*, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, (Oct. 1, 2019), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/central-americas-turbulent-northern-triangle>.

⁵ *Ending Human Trafficking in Honduras*, HUFFINGTON POST, (Dec. 6, 2017), https://www.huffpost.com/entry/ending-human-trafficking-_b_6192220.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ UPR of Honduras Second Cycle Thematic list of recommendations A/HRC/30/11 – para 125.

and illegal drug trafficking”⁸. A recommendation was also made that Honduras “[r]e-establish its police unit specialized to combat human trafficking and sexual exploitation”⁹. Honduras has indicated support for all of these recommendations, and has even begun to take measures to improve in these areas.

5. From 2016 to 2018, Honduras increased the number of investigations into suspected human trafficking. In 2016, it reported investigating at least 41 cases, in 2017 this number increased to 121, and furthermore increased to 145 cases in 2018¹⁰. While we are encouraged by the increase in cases investigated, hundreds of cases still go unnoticed.

Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking.

6. The Inter-Institutional Commission to Combat Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking in Persons (CICESCT), is a Honduran government agency that is tasked with providing care for exploited victims as well as combating human trafficking¹¹. Since its creation in 2012, the government has been increasing resources and funding for this organisation, which has allowed it to be more equipped to deal with the victims and combat human trafficking¹². As a result of these increased resources and funding, investigations into human trafficking and prosecution of traffickers has increased over the past three years¹³.

7. The CICESCT works with social workers, lawyers, psychologists, and civil society organisations to provide food, shelter, psychological services, legal services, and health screenings. In 2018, more than 300 victims of trafficking received comprehensive aid, protection, and services designed to help them recover and provide for social integration¹⁴. Additionally, 28 people were sentenced for human trafficking with prison time ranging from 5 to 15 years¹⁵.

Conclusion

8. Over the past few years Honduras has taken great strides to combat human trafficking. Providing increased resources and funding has allowed for government officials to better

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*, at para. 124.

¹⁰ *Trafficking in Persons Report June 2019*, *supra* note 1.

¹¹ *With Technical and Financial Assistance, IOM CICESCT Carries Out Actions Aimed at Reducing Irregular Migratory Flows*, SECRETARIAT OF HUMAN RIGHTS, (2 Aug. 2019) <https://www.sedh.gob.hn/noticias3/432-con-asistencia-tecnica-y-financiera-de-la-oim-cicesct-realiza-acciones-encaminadas-a-reducir-los-flujos-migratorios-irregulares>.

¹² *Combatting Human Trafficking in Honduras*, GLOBAL COMMUNITIES (8 Dec. 2019), <https://www.globalcommunities.org/node/38373>.

¹³ *Trafficking in Persons Report June 2019*, *supra* note 1.

¹⁴ *Honduras Reiterates Commitment in the Fight to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking*, SECRETARIAT OF HUMAN RIGHTS, (30 July 2019) <https://www.sedh.gob.hn/noticias3/406-honduras-reitera-compromiso-en-la-lucha-para-prevenir-y-el-combatir-la-trata-de-personas>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

investigate cases of human trafficking as well prosecute human traffickers. However, every year thousands of people are still exploited by human traffickers.

9 Thousands of Hondurans every year seek a better life and an escape from the crime and poverty. In this desperation they turn to shady individuals who promise to guide them to a country where they can achieve greater prosperity. However, these individuals often exploit those most desperate. The Honduran government should better educate the population of the dangers of this type of migration.

10. Because Honduras serves as a source and transit country for human trafficking, resources must be put into securing its borders and providing resources to police, monitoring the borders, to be better equipped to identify and stop human trafficking at the borders. This is essential in order to catch traffickers using Honduras to pass through to other countries, as well as stop those seeking to traffic Honduran citizens to other countries.