

Mekong Children Offer Governments Comprehensive Action Plan to Fight Human Trafficking

“Crack down on corruption and bribery – Punish people who use child labour – Close Karaoke Bars Linked to Sex Services”

Government officials from five Mekong countries hold dialogue with young delegates and accept first Mekong Children’s Agenda for Action on Human Trafficking

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For Immediate Release:

Bangkok – Government officials from five Mekong countries directly affected by human trafficking, today accepted a wide-ranging plan of action on human trafficking from young delegates attending the Mekong Children’s Forum on Human Trafficking.

The **Mekong Children’s Recommendations for Action on Human Trafficking** (the Agenda) were presented to the officials at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok, following four days of consultation and debate, among the children from Cambodia, China (Yunnan and Guangxi Provinces), Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam.

It is the first time that children – the group most vulnerable to human traffickers – have engaged with governments on this issue at a multi-lateral, sub-regional level.

The children attending this forum all have knowledge in dealing with the issue of trafficking. Some have direct first-hand experience of the resulting sexual and labour exploitation.

The recommendations drafted by the young delegates include a call for authorities in Mekong countries to close karaoke bars linked to the sex trade and mount a crack down on corruption and bribery. The Agenda also calls for Governments to give nationality to all children equally, designate an international day to combat trafficking, and provide greater children’s participation in anti-trafficking activities.

The Agenda makes specific references to the need for free quality education for children, especially in high-risk trafficking areas, and the need to provide scholarships to children regardless of whether they have nationality. It recommends that anti-trafficking awareness-raising activities should be included in primary and secondary school curriculum.

But the Agenda also calls on parents to do more to protect their children from traffickers and calls on society in general to be prepared to accept victims of trafficking and provide them with greater opportunities.

The children were selected by their peers to participate in the drafting of the sub-regional Agenda following a series of national and provincial children’s forums in Cambodia, China (Yunnan and Guangxi Provinces), Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam. They have brought together strong recommendations from the children’s forums in their own countries, among them ways to counter corruption, strengthen law enforcement, and enshrine the rights of citizenship and access to education for all children. Representing all the children who participated in the national and provincial forums, all the participants in the Mekong Children’s Forum speak with an authoritative voice.

Referred to as ‘modern day slavery,’ trafficking is a growing concern for Governments and societies across the Greater Mekong Sub-region, and indeed right around the world. ILO Convention 182 identifies child trafficking as a worst form of child labour, a form of exploitation to which no country is immune.

The Mekong Children’s Forum (MCF) was a joint-advocacy initiative of the International Labour Organization through its ILO-IPEC Mekong Sub Regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women and Save the Children UK. Both organizations strongly emphasize grass-roots child consultation and participation in their project work across the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

The MCF has provided a venue for children to exercise their right to express their views and to participate in the formulation of policies and actions to fight trafficking across the sub-region. It comes at a time when Governments in the GMS are in the process of drafting a Memorandum of Understanding to fight cross-border trafficking within the context of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (the COMMIT process).

Article 12, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), states that children have a right to participation and consultation in all matters that affect their lives. It states children should: “be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.”

All the countries participating in the COMMIT process have ratified the CRC.

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