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PRESS RELEASE

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Prevention of Migrant Abuse Given New Momentum at Counter-Trafficking Meeting

Thailand ‘wholeheartedly’ to protect vulnerable migrant groups from exploitation and provide equitable working standards

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

8 September 2005

BANGKOK – ILO NEWS – Government Ministers, high-level officials and leaders of influential employers’ and workers’ organizations from five Mekong countries today pledged to work together to better protect the rights of cross-border migrants, one of the groups most vulnerable to the threat of human trafficking, and review efforts to tackle trafficking from an employment-standards perspective.

Thailand receives more cross-border migrants than any other country in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

“We have started to transform the irregular workers from Cambodia and Lao PDR to be legal migrant workers and we wholeheartedly intend to provide them equitable working standards and social protection,” said H.E. Somsak Thepsutin, Minister of Labour of the Royal Thai Government at the opening session of this two-day meeting.

More than 40 senior officials from Cambodia, China (Yunnan Province), Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam have gathered in Bangkok to advise the **ILO’s Mekong Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women (TICW)** on ways that all partners can work together to better prevent trafficking with a special focus on the vulnerabilities of cross-border labour migration.

Hosted by the Royal Thai Government’s Ministry of Labour, the meeting of this advisory group provides the opportunity to break down old stereotypes about human trafficking and to deal frankly with the growing evidence of trafficking for labour exploitation – from bonded labour in sweat-shops to the hidden abuses of children and young women trafficked into domestic servitude.

Earlier this year, the ILO called for a Global Alliance to fight forced labour, adding that more than 1.3 million people were trafficked into conditions of forced labour in Asia and the Pacific – more than half of the estimated total of all victims worldwide.

The Governments of all five GMS countries participating in this advisory committee have taken considerable steps in recent years to address the issue of human trafficking through a series of bilateral Memoranda of Understanding and the multi-national COMMIT MoU designed to coordinate counter-trafficking efforts across 6 countries in the GMS.

“Preventing human trafficking is a challenge. It’s the Mekong challenge. But working together we can prevent trafficking and labour exploitation of vulnerable groups. And that’s in everyone’s interest,” said Ms. Christine Evans-Klock, Director of ILO’s Sub-regional Office for East Asia.

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There is a growing awareness world-wide that preventing human trafficking requires more effective cross-border migration policies and better labour protection for migrants in order to reduce the incentive to traffickers, while providing increased income and education opportunities closer to home for those at greatest risk.

A sustained campaign of awareness-raising and local empowerment to counter the threat of trafficking before, and during, ill-prepared migration, has also proved effective at reducing the risks of exploitation.

The high-level advisory group is expected to make a series of recommendations to the ILO's Mekong project to lead to more coordinated efforts between governments, employers' and workers' organizations in areas of advocacy, capacity building and direct assistance to better prevent trafficking of children and women in the GMS.

The TICW project is part of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and is funded by the Governments of the United Kingdom and Japan through the UK's Department for International Development and the United Nations Human Security Fund.

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