



**TESTIMONY OF LIMNYUY KONGLIM
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Thank you to Chairman McGovern and Chairman Smith and Members of the Commission for hosting this hearing on the 20th anniversary of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. The passing of the TVPA under the leadership of Congressman Smith was monumental in the year 2000, but still twenty years later victims, survivors, and those at risk of human trafficking remain in need of the protections afforded by this critical piece of legislation. The International Catholic Migration Commission is honored to receive this invitation to testify at this hearing to further highlight the importance of this bill, as well as the critical role that faith-based actors play in protecting communities and individuals at risk.

Background on ICMC

I am Limnyuy Konglim, the Head of the U.S. Liaison Office at the International Catholic Migration Commission. ICMC was founded in 1951 to promote networking among Catholic-inspired organizations responding to the needs of migrants, refugees and displaced persons, as well as to advocate, at a global level, on their behalf. ICMC currently has staff and programs in nearly 50 countries serving vulnerable populations, regardless of their faith, race, ethnicity or nationality.

Since 1999, ICMC has worked, in partnership with local organizations, to prevent and respond to human trafficking, provide direct assistance to survivors, conduct international advocacy on behalf of those most vulnerable to human trafficking, and train border officials to strengthen identification of trafficked victims and increase prosecution of traffickers. We continuously and actively engage with our faith-based partners to ensure that the needs of affected communities are identified and appropriate services are sought.

The work of ICMC is inspired by the Holy Bible, as well as by the ongoing Teaching and Tradition of the Catholic Church; and we are deeply inspired and guided by Pope Francis, who has prioritized the Church response to human trafficking. As he has so eloquently said, “We are

facing a global phenomenon that exceeds the competence of any one community or country,” and therefore, “we need a mobilization comparable in size to that of the phenomenon itself.” Last year the Vatican released the Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking, which serve as a framework for the Church to better understand and respond to human trafficking. As such, ICMC remains committed to building on our history and that of the Catholic Church to ensure that the needs of men, women, boys, and girls who are victims of human trafficking, or otherwise at-risk, are fully realized and holistically addressed.

The Importance of Faith-Based Partnerships

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act has provided a policy framework that prioritizes the protection of those who have been unjustly exploited. It is within this same spirit that faith-based actors are invaluable partners in these efforts. Churches and other religious institutions are stalwarts within communities. They embody community and remain present- with or without the support of local or international donors. Churches are safe havens for individuals and often times the first place that victims seek protection and support.

In recognition of the Church’s unique ability to identify and serve, in April 2019, the Vatican hosted a conference with over 200 attendees from Catholic institutions and other anti-trafficking experts to discuss the Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking. In this meeting over 695 recommendations were developed on how the Church could better harness its collective action to prevent and respond to human trafficking globally. One overwhelming theme that came out of that meeting was the need to better leverage partnerships to advocate and serve.

ICMC’s work is guided by Catholic social teaching and further rooted in the protection of life and human dignity. Human trafficking violates the dignity of the person, thus our commitment to this work is value and not profit driven. As I noted earlier, faith-based actors are committed to serving their community, and are often inherently first responders- through the physical church, support centers run by religious congregations, and its members who encounter individuals in seek of support. It is important to note that these principles and structures are not unique to only Catholics, and thus the value and scope of faith-based actors as long-term and sustainable partners in the fight against human trafficking can not be underestimated.

Consistent with this theme, ICMC welcomes the engagement of the Department of State’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons’ of faith-based groups for input into its annual Trafficking in Persons Report. The report consistently acknowledges the role of faith-based organizations in serving victims, even highlighting that in many countries faith-based organizations are the primary service providers- and not governments. This is a testament to the efforts that Catholic and other faith-based actors have made to professionalize their work. Furthermore, considering the deep presence and trust of grassroot Catholic organizations within vulnerable communities, there has been a concerted effort to build their capacity. Organizations

such as ICMC, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Caritas International to name a few- have provided both organizational and technical assistance to enhance the response of local actors. For this reason, it is critical that faith-based actors receive greater consideration as implementing partners, in addition to suppliers of information for reporting.

The Approach to Service

In continuous service to their communities, faith-based partners also seek to consistently understand and address root causes of human trafficking, as well as barriers to protection for survivors. Service to communities is people-centered and seeks the full restoration- not just return- but holistic restoration and reintegration of survivors back into their communities. Pastoral care and counseling is provided to both survivors and their families, who also often have to cope with distress due to the exploitation that their relatives have endured. And in many instances, religious leaders are critical to combatting negative cultural norms, that may have been a contributing factor to the initial trafficking occurrence- ie child labor and forced marriage.

Many of the front-line service providers that I have met with often reiterate the importance of community and familial engagement when implementing prevention and response programming. Human trafficking affects the most vulnerable people in society, but we know that global crises and family separation make migrants even more vulnerable. Traffickers profit exponentially from victims that are lacking personal support and worry about how they will be received if they are reunited with their families. While, as practitioners and policy-makers, many of us oppose narratives that promote victim blaming, we know that many survivors are met with shame in their communities, particularly if they have been sexually exploited, forced to commit gross atrocities, or were forced into trafficking situations to reduce financial burdens on their families.

In a recent meeting hosted by ICMC in Bangkok last month, church partners exchanged best practices and challenges in preventing and responding to human trafficking in the Asia/Oceania region. ICMC, member organization, Caritas Bangladesh, shared the plight of street children, who are extremely vulnerable and often victims of trafficking. Bangladesh has over 1.5 million street children under the age of 14, the majority migrating to the capital city of Dhaka from rural areas throughout the country. Most survive by begging, hawking small goods, dealing drugs, prostitution, and other exploitative means. Caritas Bangladesh provides the children with clothing, shelter, sanitary supplies, healthcare, schooling, vocational training, and psychosocial support. However, one of the greatest challenges they face is reunifying children with their families even after they are found because many ended up on the streets due to parental pressure to provide income. In cases such as these, faith-based actors can play a very unique and influential role by not only protecting victims, but also combatting harmful practices within their communities.

Conclusion

In closing, we thank the Commission for engaging multiple stakeholders on such an important issue. It is inspiring to participate in a hearing with governmental, non-governmental, and faith actors all committed to a single cause- combatting human trafficking. We look forward to furthering these joint efforts in the years to come in coordination and partnership with the US government and other stakeholders with shared values and commitments.