



WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY & EMPOWERMENT AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND DISCRIMINATION

THE MEKONG WOMEN'S FORUM | HANOI, VIETNAM JULY 12-13, 2007

News Release

Mekong Women's Forum

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HANOI (ILO News) – Women activists and eminent speakers on the problems of human trafficking and gender discrimination today called for greater involvement of women and vulnerable groups in the fight against human trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

While the organization and execution of anti-trafficking measures tend to fall upon Governments, participants at the Mekong Women's Forum, drawn from five countries of the GMS, suggested other groups – especially those most vulnerable to trafficking – should play a greater role in national and sub-regional responses to the problem – especially since these groups have first-hand experience in combating trafficking.

“The work against human trafficking and discrimination cannot rest solely in the hands of government,” said Ms. Sachiko Yamamoto, Regional Director for the International Labour Organization's Asia and Pacific Office.

“Ordinary men, women and children, [need] to stand up and claim the rights they own, and to demand that Governments, societies and citizens also take action. Women and their organizations are playing a crucial role,” Ms. Yamamoto said at the opening of this two-day event in the Vietnamese capital.

Hosted by the Viet Nam Women's Union, The Mekong Women's Forum has attracted speakers and participants from Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam, all of whom have experience in counter-trafficking efforts in their countries.

“In Viet Nam, most trafficked women and children suffer from poverty, lack of employment, low education level or unhappy families who often migrate from rural areas to cities or commercial areas” said Ms. Ha Thi Khiem, President of the Viet Nam Women's Union.

Ms. Khiem said her organization was “continuously renovating methodologies in community education” to enhance understanding of human trafficking at grass-roots level, especially as relates to ill-prepared migration – a time when people, especially women and children, are most vulnerable to trafficking, sexual and labour exploitation.

“As women’s groups and organizations, we could do a lot to assist in the whole cycle of activities. Many of us have already undertaken many important projects,” said Dr. Saisuree Chutikul, the keynote speaker and one of the regions pre-eminent experts on countering gender discrimination and coordinating cross-border responses to trafficking.

While poverty and varying levels of gender empowerment are common themes found in all five countries, the Mekong Women’s Forum also was shown working ‘good practices’ already underway to prevent and protect women from trafficking-related abuses.

Dr. Saisuree suggested women’s groups and organizations across the GMS begin and/or intensify work with Governments in four key areas: developing and working within national policy and legal frameworks, in the area of prosecution, in the collective areas of protection, repatriation, recovery and reintegration of trafficking victims, and finally in the area of prevention – an area she noted that women’s organizations had played a particularly active role.

The Forum was expected to draft a series of specific recommendations to coordinate their efforts in the future.

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