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## China's Long-Awaited Action Plan on Trafficking Aims To Provide "Sustainable" Solutions

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China's first national plan to combat trafficking of women and children formalizes cooperation among agencies and establishes a national information and reporting system. The State Council's General Office issued China's National Plan of Action on Combating Trafficking in Women and Children (2008-2012) on December 13, 2007. The long-awaited plan, which was submitted for approval in July 2006, went into effect on January 1, 2008, and will be implemented over the next five years.

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The MPS estimates that 10,000 women and children are kidnapped and sold each year, while the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that up to 20,000 people are trafficked annually in China, according to the China Daily article and the U.S. State Department's 2003 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. Of these, public security officials have registered a decreasing number of cases in recent years, prompting the MPS to state that trafficking-related crimes in parts of China have been effectively contained, according to a December 12 MPS article. The MPS reported 23,163 cases in 2000, 7,008 in 2001, 5,684 in 2002, 3,721 in 2003, 3,343 in 2004, 2,884 in 2005, 2,569 in 2006, and 2,375 in 2007, according to a March 10 Washington Post article and the 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006 China Statistical Yearbook. In recent years, the MPS has handled an increasing number of cases involving forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation, and gang-related and cross-border components, and a decrease in the number of cases involving the trafficking of women and children for marriage and adoption, according to the plan and a July 27 China Daily article. At a press conference on December 14, MPS Vice Minister Zhang Xinfeng noted that the plan underscores China's efforts to move from "combating trafficking" to "anti-trafficking." Such a shift aims to broaden the focus from prosecution and rescue to also include prevention, protection of victims, and supporting victims' reintegration into society, as reported in a December 15 Beijing Youth Daily article.

The release of the plan fulfills an obligation made by the Chinese government to the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT), according to the State Department's Trafficking in Persons Interim Assessment that was released on January 19, 2007, and a July 13 China Daily article. COMMIT is a government-led initiative, supported by the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), to foster cross-border cooperation between countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion, including China, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, and Burma, according to information posted on the UNIAP Web site. The plan, released on December 13, coincided with China's hosting of the COMMIT Second Inter-Ministerial Meeting in Beijing on December 12-14, 2007, according to a UNIAP article posted on January 7. The joint declaration signed at the meeting reaffirmed cooperation between the six countries and pledged for the first time to include "civil society groups" in future antitrafficking efforts.

At a recent MPS forum, public security officials identified existing challenges in combating trafficking and the next steps for implementing the plan. Individuals from local public security bureaus discussed difficulties in their everyday work, including the lack of an office and personnel that focuses full-time on combating trafficking, financial restraints, and difficulties in discovering cases, and rescuing and repatriating victims, according to the January 24 MPS article. The plan outlined challenges including the need to enhance laws and regulations, define the functions of government agencies, strengthen interagency cooperation, and improve access to funding. According to a January 30 MPS article, Zhang Xinfeng convened a meeting with representatives from the Ministry's Criminal Investigation Bureau and the Combating Trafficking Office to discuss next steps for implementing the plan, which include:

- Holding a joint meeting of the 28 government agencies, confirming its members, and raising awareness of the plan;
- Working with the Ministry of Finance to resolve finances associated with anticrime campaigns to combat trafficking;
- Researching and investigating the current number of trafficking crimes in women and children, standardizing the way criminal case reports are received and guidelines for docketing a case, and setting up an antitrafficking hotline;
- Enlarging crackdowns and strengthening punishment for traffickers;
- Having each local criminal investigation unit strive to establish a special office to combat trafficking, and providing financial assistance and a subsidy to handle cases that involve gang-related crimes and major cases of trafficking in women and children.

It remains to be seen to what extent the plan will strengthen antitrafficking efforts. Implementing measures currently being formulated and cooperation on items such as funding will play a significant role in the successful implementation of the plan. The plan, with a focus on women and children, neglects male adults, who are often targeted for forced labor. The February 28 Trafficking in Persons Interim Assessment stated that China's government made "modest efforts" to combat trafficking in the latter half of 2007, although it still does not provide adequate care for victims.

### Overview of China's National Plan of Action on Combating Trafficking in Women and Children The Plan mandates:

- **Establishment of a ministerial-level joint meeting** headed by the Ministry of Public Security and comprising of 28 agencies. Local regions should establish offices to combat trafficking, especially in areas that have a high number of trafficking cases.
- **Establishment of national information and reporting systems** to "improve the mechanism for information collection and exchange on combating crime," and encourage the public to report trafficking-related criminal activities. A December 15 Beijing Youth Daily article notes that China will establish a database that contains DNA information of women and children who have been trafficked and a database of criminal suspects involved in the crime of trafficking women and children. This may help the Chinese government identify trafficking victims among those arrested for prostitution.
- **Funding** for the implementation of the Plan is to be derived from national and local government sources, as well as solicited from social groups, public organizations, enterprises, institutions, individuals, and international sources.

### The Plan's Main Areas of Focus Includes:

- **Building education and awareness** among the public and law enforcement personnel, especially in key areas and with at-risk populations, in order to exchange information, learn best practices, and improve existing legislation and the current system.
- **Preventing trafficking-related crimes** through poverty alleviation, education, and vocational training programs tailored to at-risk populations, encouraging women to participate in the community, increasing public awareness of laws and regulations related to trafficking, especially in areas such as railway and bus stations, and strengthening assistance to at-risk groups. Strengthen regulation of activities related to recruitment, professional intermediaries, and the registration system of labor contracts, and help with the successful reintegration of criminals into society. Provincial governments in key areas will sign "cooperation letters of intent" by the end of 2008, and aim to control trafficking by the end of 2012.
- **Combating crime and rescuing trafficked women and children**, with the goal that the "ratio of cracked cases to reported cases should witness an obvious increase" by the end of 2012. Public security agencies in key areas should strengthen efforts to combat trafficking, and launch anti-crime campaigns. Agencies should "investigate and punish units illegally using child labor, and ban illegal Internet intermediaries like employment and marriage arrangement Web sites. Units or individuals who buy or introduce abducted and trafficked women and children or force them to engage in sexual acts or other forms of forced labor will be prosecuted for their administrative, civil and criminal liabilities."
- **Strengthening relief and rehabilitation of rescued women and children** by increasing the number of women and children who receive training, aid, and medical treatment, such as by adding "institutions for relief service, transfer, and rehabilitation as well as training" to agencies and training personnel at these institutions, encouraging companies, groups, and individuals to provide financial and technical support and services, and providing legal aid and legal awareness training to rescued women and children. Rescued children of school age should return to school, while women and minors over 16 who cannot or are not willing to return to their original residences should receive vocational training and help with finding a job. Rescued women and children should be successfully reintegrated into society and agencies should "strengthen registration, management, and protection" by establishing "specialized archives," and "track the living conditions of rescued women and children." Agencies should "strengthen research on physical and mental health" of trafficked women and children, and strengthen cooperation between "different regions, departments, and institutions."
- **Strengthening international cooperation** among police, United Nations agencies, and other international entities, strengthening border control, entry-exit certificate inspection, and "cracking down on illegal activities that involve crossing national borders." In border areas, build awareness of laws, prevention measures, and crime identification among the public and law enforcement personnel. In addition, strengthen supervision of the labor market, and "regulate the operation of overseas employment intermediaries."

While many of the initiatives are not new, the plan mandates the implementation of these initiatives nationwide or on a larger scale in key areas that have an especially high rate of trafficking, such as Guangdong, Fujian, Henan, Sichuan, and Anhui provinces. Other initiatives, such as establishing national information and reporting systems, represent government efforts to improve data collection and the standardization of policies related to trafficking.

For more information, see the section on Human Trafficking, in the CECC's 2007 Annual Report.

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