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United Nations Inter-Agency
Project on Human Trafficking

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Greater Mekong Sub-Region: International workshop strengthens cooperation on transnational human trafficking investigations and prosecutions

Phnom Penh, 11-13 January 2012 - A regional criminal justice workshop designed to strengthen international cooperation on human trafficking investigations and prosecutions was held this week in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Key officials in the fight against human trafficking in the Mekong region, including police and judicial government agencies, United Nations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended a workshop to discuss how to strengthen regional collaboration in the areas of criminal investigation and prosecution in transnational human trafficking cases.

The workshop is part of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT), a government-led process engaging the governments of Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, supported by the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) as COMMIT Secretariat.

In the Mekong region and globally, countries face many challenges in international cooperation on transnational human trafficking cases, many with substantially different policies and procedures on formal and informal police and legal cooperation. Practicalities such as the ability to share intelligence and processes to request formal legal assistance were some of the issues raised by experts attending the workshop.

“Consistent and agreed legal cooperation processes are key requirements if we are going to address human trafficking from a regional perspective,” said Mr. Pham Long Bien of the Department of Anti Drugs and Trafficking, Border Guard Command, Vietnam.

“Supporting police to share relevant intelligence on human trafficking crimes with their international counterparts is vital. The sharing of this information assists in identifying all the suspects, crime scenes, and other possible victims needing assistance, irrespective of what country the crime was committed. Intelligence sharing enables police to investigate transnational trafficking cases across a range of countries,” said Dr. Lisa Rende Taylor, Chief Technical Specialist of UNIAP.

Another key topic raised by participants was the role that victim support agencies can play in strengthening international cooperation on human trafficking, specifically in criminal investigations and through the prosecution process.

“Internal and external cooperation may be necessary to improve in both source and destination countries, in order to have the mutual legal assistance properly implemented

with a rights-based approach,” said Mr. Yi Yuth Virak, National Project Coordinator, ARTIP Cambodia.

“We have learned over time that if foreign victims of trafficking are not fully informed of the procedures and timeframes of the investigative and prosecution processes, in their own language, there can be many negative consequences to the criminal case as well as to the victims themselves. Keeping victims informed in their language and attending to their needs is a good way to improve their cooperation with prosecutions as well as to improve their overall well-being,” said Mrs. Thoummaly Vongphachanh, Director General of the Counseling and Protection Center for Women and Children, Lao PDR.

The workshop will generate a number of key recommendations to be considered for endorsement by the Senior Officials of the COMMIT Process at the 8th COMMIT Senior Officials Meeting to be held in Hanoi, Vietnam in February 2012.

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