

Hi,

I would like to congratulate the Australian Border Force for developing a sound National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery 2020-24.

I understand that the submissions for the 'National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery 2020-24' closed on 31 January 2020. However, I am sending a few comments, in case they can still be considered.

My comments are based on my experience of being involved in a national study on human trafficking in India between 2017-19.

- 1) Programs for rehabilitation and social reintegration of trafficked victims involve being part of the trafficked persons' journey towards physical and psychological safety and wellness, developing adequate earning capacities, reconstructing identities and relationships, reaching native states and countries safely or obtaining documentation for asylum in Australia. Given that family constitutes a culturally significant unit in the social re-integration process, especially in the Asian context, some of the services may have to be extended to the family members of the trafficked victims as well.
- 2) Mental health service and care should be an important component of the rehabilitation and reintegration programs. The victims, once rescued, are often in a traumatised condition and this may affect the statements they give to testify against their traffickers. Sometimes coercion from the trafficking network may compel a victim to not give a testimony against their traffickers. Mental health support and care will ensure that the victims are able to testify against their traffickers without any fear.
- 3) It is important to listen to the voices of those who have been trafficked. A consultation with them can lead to important policy decisions.
- 4) It is important to understand the socio-economic, cultural and political vulnerabilities that lead people to being trapped in the trafficking networks.
- 5) Community-based rehabilitation processes may also be explored.
- 6) It is important to create awareness amongst various stakeholders and state functionaries about the nuances of the *modus operandi* of trafficking. This will ensure that the chain of trafficking is nipped at the source. To create an increased awareness, training programs on trafficking for state functionaries in different departments should be made mandatory.
- 7) It has been well researched that those at the margins of social hierarchies are the lowest in the trafficking chain and most easily identifiable by the police. To tackle the issue of modern slavery and trafficking, it is important to identify the kingpin of the trafficking network and not merely lower level functionaries in the chain. Therefore, it is important not to view the category of trafficker as one homogenous category, but to focus on the different levels at which individuals are involved in this chain.
- 8) A large number of trafficking cases are initiated in the cyber space. The trafficking network now involves the use of technology to transport humans from one place to another. This is a departure from the past where the trafficker and the victim had a human contact. In many instances, the victims do not even see their trafficker. In such instance, the intervention of the cyber cell is crucial. More importantly, the monetary transactions for these cases of trafficking takes place through bitcoins, which itself is difficult to track.
- 9) Given the cross border nature of trafficking, it is important to hold consultative meetings with stakeholders from source countries to understand the trajectories of those who have been trafficked and ensure that upon rescue they are safe in either their country of origin or destination.

10) Overall, the response to trafficking should not just have a prosecution focus but should involve a great concentration on the care and reintegration of the victims.

I will be happy to engage with these issues further and answer any questions that may emerge. The comments are my own and based on my research experience and do not reflect the position of the organisation I work with or have worked with previously. I will be keen to offer my expertise in the area to further strengthen the National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery 2020-24.

Thanking you,

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