

**Op-Ed on Human Trafficking by Charge d'Affaires James D. Pettit
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The crime of human trafficking (TIP) adversely affects us all, including the United States. It deprives people of their most basic human rights and freedoms; it poses a public health risk; and it is a major source of illicit revenue for organized crime. It is a problem that cannot be ignored by any of us in the world community. Each year the United States government publishes a report assessing the efforts and achievements of each country to combat trafficking. The report is intended to bring an issue that is often carefully hidden out into the open.

At least 12.3 million people are victims of human trafficking around the world based on research conducted by the International Labor Organization. This includes trafficking within a country's borders and across borders. Trafficking for the purposes of forced labor is the most prevalent form of this problem, but commercial sexual exploitation and child exploitation remain equally serious issues. Ukraine continues to be a source, transit and, to a lesser extent, destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. Ukraine's trafficking victims are similar to the global pattern, with 49% of all victims assisted during the year having suffered from labor exploitation, a dramatic increase from 2007.

It is important to note that the report states that while the Government of Ukraine does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, it is making significant efforts to do so. However, because of slow progress, Ukraine was downgraded this year to the Tier II "Watch List." This means that a further review will be conducted at the end of the year, to evaluate the Government's progress on commitments to anti-trafficking reforms over the next year. As a way to help focus these efforts, the TIP report offers recommendations to governments for improving their fight against trafficking. This year's report recommends that the Government of Ukraine seek sentences for convicted trafficking offenders that require them to serve appropriate jail time, as the percentage of convicted traffickers that go to jail has decreased from last year. A key recommendation is that the government take steps to curb the complicity by government officials in trafficking, as the success of traffickers is often dependent on official paperwork or border crossings.

The news is not all bad - some of the report's' recommendations are areas that the Government has recently committed to addressing, including developing formal systems to guide law enforcement in investigating trafficking cases, and identifying trafficking victims. For example, one oblast government provided funding for victim prevention and reintegration activities. To assist these efforts, the United States is proud to partner with Ukraine to identify, free and help victims of trafficking wherever possible. We work closely with various Ministries, with oblast and regional governments, with police and prosecutors, and with NGOs to provide assistance, spending over \$1 million annually on anti-trafficking programs. Only by working together can we combat this terrible violation of human rights. We hope that Ukraine will strengthen its efforts in the coming months to achieve this goal.