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ASEAN PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

July 10, 2015

The Honorable Mr. Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As a Member of the U.S. Congress and a Member of Parliament of Malaysia, both dedicated to human rights, we write to express our deep concern over trafficking in persons in the ASEAN region. We are particularly concerned about reports that possible political considerations may sway the State Department toward upgrading the current Tier designations of Malaysia, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Burma in its soon to be released annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report.

The recent discovery of mass graves in trafficking camps along the Malaysia-Thailand border and the boat crisis endangering thousands of Rohingya asylum seekers and other human trafficking victims who have taken to sea from Burma and Bangladesh highlight the ongoing plague of human trafficking in the region. Acknowledging that the TIP Report and designations are based on the previous year ending in March 2015, we also recognize that the conditions in trafficking camps were very much present throughout 2014, and that the failure of regional governments to take a stronger stance in the previous year contributed to the crises of 2015.

We applaud more recent regional efforts to combat human trafficking, including arrests of high-profile traffickers and senior officials in the Thai army complicit in trafficking networks. However, we also recognize that not enough has been done to stop these networks. Thailand, for example, prosecuted fewer human traffickers in 2014 than it did in 2013. Malaysia remains a major hub for trafficking and abuse of asylum seekers, including by government officials. Bangladesh continues to deny basic protections for Rohingya fleeing persecution in Burma. Malaysia and Thailand are currently listed as Tier 3 nations, the lowest designation, for failing to meet the minimum standards for combatting human trafficking. Bangladesh is listed as Tier 2, and Burma is listed as a "Tier 2 Watch List" country.

Burma, in particular, should be considered for downgrade to Tier 3, as its persecution of Rohingya is at the root of the recent boat crisis. It has not only failed to meet minimal standards, but has also actively exacerbated the problem of human trafficking and human rights abuses toward victims in the region through its policies toward Rohingya.

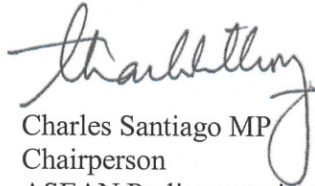
Political considerations, whether related to the Trans-Pacific Partnership or otherwise, should not trump serious human rights concerns. ASEAN countries should be further engaged, encouraged, and supported in their efforts to combat human trafficking, not rewarded for half measures and, in some cases, even

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complicity. Rewarding Bangladesh, Burma, Malaysia, or Thailand with an upgrade in Tier ranking would serve only as a devaluation of internationally recognized human rights and would send a dangerous signal to the world about the United States' commitment to ending modern day slavery.

Sincerely,



Charles Santiago MP
Chairperson
ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights



Joseph R. Pitts M.O.C.
Co-Chairman
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

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