

April 17th, 2012

Joint civil society statement regarding National Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons



We welcome the publication by the Inter-agency Taskforce on Trafficking in Persons (the Taskforce) of the National Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons 2012-2015 (the NPA). We see this as an encouraging indication of the government's commitment to combat human trafficking in Singapore. It is also a positive first step towards establishing a system which endeavours to prevent human trafficking in Singapore, guarantees comprehensive protection of trafficked and potentially trafficked persons and prosecutes those responsible.

We are also pleased that civil society was consulted as part of the development of the NPA and we welcome the envisaged on-going partnership between the Taskforce and civil society. As civil society members, we are also keen to facilitate this process and met recently to discuss how we can contribute to the work ahead.

We are of the view that accession to the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol) should be a priority for the Taskforce. We urge the Taskforce to fast-track the enactment into Singapore law of the definition of trafficking set out in Article 3 of the Palermo Protocol, given the importance of having an agreed starting point for all efforts to combat trafficking in Singapore. We also ask the Taskforce to identify the ways in which this definition is currently being operationalised by government agencies when dealing with cases of trafficked and potentially trafficked persons.

We ask for a range of interim measures to be put in place and that the taskforce work collaboratively with civil society organisations on this issue. This is important as the enactment of a dedicated anti-trafficking law, which establishes a comprehensive system of prevention,

prosecution and protection, may not be in place for some time. Civil society organisations have an important role to play in developing, implementing and monitoring interim measures through which trafficked and potentially trafficked persons can access the services and support.

We ask for international standards and best practices to be utilised in the implementation of the NPA. In its most recent concluding observations on Singapore (2011), the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women recommended both the ratification of the Palermo Protocol and the enactment of specialized legislation against trafficking in persons, as well as the ratification of other instruments relevant to human trafficking, such as the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families and ILO Conventions No. 111 and No. 189. The Taskforce is urged to take these recommendations into consideration when implementing the NPA.

We state that there is a broad range of expertise and skills amongst the civil society organisations here which we hope the Taskforce will utilise fully when implementing the NPA, particularly in relation to:

- i) Research into a) the nature and scale of human trafficking in Singapore, b) the effectiveness of existing measures and c) the relevant international standards and best practices from other jurisdictions, all of which should inform the work of the Taskforce and its partners.
- ii) Training all relevant stakeholders, within government and civil society, based on the experience of civil society organisations, which have long-standing experience of working with trafficked and potentially trafficked persons.
- iii) Co-ordinating targeted awarenessraising campaigns, informed by research, amongst the government, the trafficked and potentially trafficked persons, the media and the Singapore public at large.
- iv) The provision of direct services to trafficked and potentially trafficked persons, the co-ordination of outreach programmes amongst service-users, the referral of trafficking cases to the Taskforce and active engagement in the subsequent victim-centred processes of prosecution and protection.

As civil society organisations, we are committed to the process and will meet regularly as a forum to co-ordinate our anti-trafficking-related work throughout the implementation period of the NPA. We therefore ask the Taskforce to consider formalising regular engagement with this forum of civil society organisations to develop and implement the details of the high-level strategy set out in the NPA in a transparent and collaborative manner.

Signatories:

1. Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME) (coorganiser of meeting)
2. The Trafficking Research Project (TTRP) (coorganiser of meeting)
3. AWARE
4. EMANCIPASIA
5. Good Shepherd Sisters
6. Jacqueline Tan (Civil Society Activist)
7. MARUAH
8. ONE (SINGAPORE)
9. Project X

10. Singapore Committee For UN Women
11. Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO)
12. Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2)
13. Vincent Law (Civil Society Activist)