

NZ identified as destination country for labour and sex trafficking

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New Zealand has once again been found to be a destination country for forced labour and sex trafficking, and a source country for sex trafficking of children.

The 2018 Trafficking in Persons (Tip) report, released by the US Department of State in Washington today, said foreign women from Asia and South America faced the risk of sex trafficking here, and some international students and temporary visa holders were vulnerable to forced labour and prostitution.

It singled out men and women from the Pacific Islands, China, India, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Latin America as being vulnerable to forced labour in the agricultural, dairy, construction, viticulture, food service and hospitality industries.

"Unregulated and unlicensed immigration brokers operating in New Zealand and source countries, particularly in India and the Philippines, assist victims of labour exploitation in New Zealand obtain visas," the report said.

Some were charged excessive recruitment fees, made to work excessively long hours and had their passports retained and movements restricted.

"New Zealand girls and boys, often from minority communities, are at risk of sex trafficking," it said.

"Some children are recruited by other girls or compelled by family members into sex trafficking."

However, the report gave New Zealand a top "Tier 1" status, recognising that the New Zealand Government fully met the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking.

New Zealand was first identified as a destination country by the report for labour and sex trafficking five years ago.

Immigration Minister Iain Lees-Galloway said the report acknowledged New Zealand's efforts to prevent and combat human trafficking and highlighted several "positive steps" taken by the Government.

Immigration Minister Iain Lees-Galloway.

"New Zealand has again been granted the highest possible status and one that we've maintained since the report was introduced in 2000," Lees-Galloway said.

The report called for the Government to amend the trafficking statute to remove the possibility of fine alone as a sentence for trafficking crimes.

It also wants a change in definition of sex trafficking to include children as not requiring the use of deception or coercion.

Other recommendations include increasing resources for anti-trafficking enforcement and efforts to identify victims, including women and children in prostitution.

Lees-Galloway said the Government would "actively consider" all the report's recommendations.

"Eliminating exploitation of migrants is one of my top priorities as Minister of Immigration, and the Government will work hard to achieve that aim," he said.

"A business-led work plan is being developed, focused on practical steps governments and businesses can take to eliminate slavery and human trafficking."

The plan will be presented at the next Bali Process Ministerial meeting in August, the minister said.

United States Ambassador Scott Brown said the US was committed to partnering with NZ to combat the "horrific practice" of human trafficking.

"Neither of our governments are complacent about this global scourge. We're making progress, but we know we can and must do better."

Brown said it was an issue he personally cared deeply about.

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