

**STATEMENT OF
NGUYEN DINH THANG, PHD
CEO & PRESIDENT
BOAT PEOPLE SOS
Email: bpsos@bpsos.org**

October 27, 2021

**HEARING ON
COMBATING GLOBAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING
BY**

**THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH AND GLOBAL
HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Madam Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee,

I applaud your holding this timely and necessary hearing to shine the spotlight on countries that deserve special scrutiny. Vietnam is one such country. This year, Vietnam remains in the Tier 2-Watch List for the third consecutive year instead of being dropped to Tier 3, thanks to a Presidential Waiver. The rationale for the waiver is that “the government [of Vietnam] has devoted sufficient resources to a written plan that, if implemented, would constitute significant efforts to meet the minimum standards.”

We have observed a recurring pattern over the past two decades: Whenever on the brink of being ranked Tier 3, Vietnam went through the motions of passing new laws, introducing new regulations, investigating a few insignificant perpetrators, and/or prosecuting a few low-ranking government officials. They have deftly escaped Tier 3 ranking.

Since the late 1990s, Vietnam’s labor export program has sent some 1.5 million Vietnamese workers overseas. Currently there are approximately 400,000 Vietnamese migrant workers in 40 countries. They generate between 3 and 4 billion US dollars in remittance annually. This is big business that the government protects aggressively and by all means.

In 2008, my organization launched Coalition to Abolish Modern-day Slavery in Asia (CAMSA). We have since directly or indirectly rescued some 8,000 Vietnamese labor trafficking victims in 24 countries. In the process, we have identified 40 Vietnamese labor export companies involved in labor trafficking. None has been investigated, let alone prosecuted. Some of them even received awards for excellence in performance year after year. In contrast, victims who spoke out against unscrupulous labor export companies have been threatened with imprisonment or traffic accidents; some were stabbed by strangers or injured in traffic accidents believed to be staged by the police. A handful of targeted victims who fled Vietnam have been recognized as refugees by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

In recent years, labor trafficking in Vietnam has gotten worse, not better. The number of labor export companies has exploded, numbering over 400. They are engaged in the same, if not more, exploitative practices. The government continues to defend the trafficking syndicates that take advantage of its labor export program. A close study of the 20,000 Vietnamese maids currently working in Saudi Arabia would test Vietnam's compliance with recommendations from the Department of State's 2021 Trafficking-in-Persons (TIP) report.

Prevention

The TIP report offered no recommendations on prevention, stating that “[t]he government increased efforts to prevent trafficking.” The following cases in point highlight deficiencies.

(1) Since April 2021, CAMSA has identified 40 victims, including four minors, sent to work as domestic servants in Saudi Arabia. Radio Free Asia, Voice of America and our own social media have run stories about these victims. On the other hand, Vietnam's state media – the state controls all official media – have maintained a deafening silence on these cases. Media coverage of such stories would make potential labor export candidates aware of the risks and cautionary measures they must consider.

(2) Of the 29 labor export companies that sent large numbers of maids to Saudi Arabia, we have identified nine (9) that were involved in multiple trafficking cases. See **Appendix 1**. Two of them, COLECTO and Nam Viet, are jointly represented by Ms. Trương Thị Hiền in Saudi Arabia. Many identified victims reported being re-trafficked by her to different employers. The Vietnamese embassy in Riyadh officially lists her as the go-to person for all workers recruited by the said two companies; its Labor Attaché routinely referred to her victims who ended up being re-trafficked.

(3) Due to the ongoing pandemic, labor export to Saudi Arabia has stopped, which gave rise to Vietnamese-run labor trafficking rings operating within Saudi Arabia. They take

advantage of the thousands of domestic workers trapped in the country because of travel restrictions. Even victims already admitted to shelters are not safe. One trafficking ring, run by a former Vietnamese maid by the name Thái Thị Hà, relies on the said Vietnamese Labor Attaché to extract victims from shelters and sell them to employers in remote towns and cities. From October 15, 2020, to March 22, 2021, Mr. Khánh reportedly took some 20 workers from the Khadimat Center and SAKAN Center. Three of these victims who were rescued by the Saudi police on September 19 reported that Mr. Khánh tricked them to check out of the shelter for a repatriation flight later that day. They were instead taken to Ms. Hà's home and later transferred to Najran, a Southern town near the border with Yemen. Their new employer explained that she had bought them for the equivalent of US \$8,000. They were beaten by the employer's henchmen for protesting and forced to sign a two-years contract. The whereabouts of four other women extracted from the same shelter on the same day by Mr. Khánh remains unknown.

Reportedly, Mr. Khánh also sent some victims to two former Vietnamese maids who notoriously ran a commercial sex ring. Yet, he is still listed by the Vietnamese embassy as the official point of contact for workers to sign up with for repatriation. The basic principle in prevention is to block known or suspected perpetrators' access to victims or potential victims.

Protection

The TIP report concluded that “[t]he government maintained overall efforts to protect victims.” This conclusion certainly does not apply to the large and growing number of victims in Saudi Arabia. None of the victims who reported having come to the Vietnamese embassy for help received any assistance let alone protection.

(1) Ms. Huỳnh Thi Gấm was victim of the trafficking ring run by Ms. Trương Thị Hiền and her Arab companion, known as Aziz. They both worked for the Qrmmah Alfalah

Recruitment Office, a local human resource agency. Hiền also represents labor export companies COLECTO and Nam Việt. After four months of exploitation, beating and sexual harassment by her first employer, Gắm wanted to go home. In December 2019, her mother in Vietnam paid the equivalent of US \$3,500 to HAVIMEC, the labor export company that recruited Gắm, for her repatriation. Regardless, Hiền and Aziz sold her to the second and then the third employer. In late July 2020, Gắm escaped and went to the Vietnamese embassy for help; Mr. Khánh, the Labor Attaché, delivered her back to Hiền and Aziz, who sold her to the fourth employer. After two months, this employer dropped her at a local human resource agency, the manager of which raped her and forced her to give him daily body massage, for 20 days. Hiền and Aziz then sent Gắm to the fifth, then the sixth employer, whose daughter frequently and brutally beat her. On May 20, 2021, Gắm successfully escaped and was taken by the Saudi police first to a local shelter and then to the SAKAN Center in Riyadh. Throughout her 25-months ordeal, Gắm repeatedly called HAVIMEC's Executive Director, Hiền and Khánh for help; they all blocked her calls. Only once was she able to talk to Khánh, using a borrowed phone; that was December 2020. He promised to put her on the next flight home. Gắm is still in Saudi Arabia.

(2) We have identified four minors among the victims and have reasons to believe that many more minors are being held captive by their employers in Saudi Arabia. Ms. H'Xuân Siu was only 14 when she was recruited by VINACO, which added seven (7) years to her age on the passport they applied on her behalf. When she died on July 17 this year, she had not reached 18. Before her death, she left multiple voice messages asking for help from VINACO, detailing the beatings she was subjected to by her employer. In her last message, she reported being whipped with a cord until she passed out. Another minor, from H'Xuân's same village, made it home alive. She was also recruited by VINACO and knows of other

minors sent to Saudi Arabia by VINACO, all being from Montagnard Christian families in Dak Lak Province. Responding to news coverage of trafficked minors by Radio Free Asia and Voice of America, on October 7, the spokeswoman of Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) acknowledged the death of H'Xuân but wrongly affirmed that she was born in 1996 – her correct birth year was 2003. MOFA's spokeswoman did not mention any government efforts to rescue other trafficked minors mentioned in the news stories.

Speaking to reporters on October 16, Mr. Doãn Mậu Diệp, MOLISA's Deputy Minister, downplayed the news stories on RFA and VOA, characterized the problems as occasional irregularities caused by some labor export companies not fully complying with MOLISA regulations, and lauded the Labor Attaché in Saudi Arabia for competently fixing these problems. In reality, of all the trafficked victims who reported calling or coming to the Vietnamese embassy for help, none was referred to the Saudi police for protection.

Prosecution

The TIP report concluded that “[t]he government increased law enforcement efforts.” We have not observed any law enforcement efforts with regard to the trafficking cases identified by us and brought to the attention of the Vietnamese government by international agencies and foreign diplomatic missions.

1. Four days after H'Xuân Siu died in Saudi Arabia, her mother was told by the District Police to sign an agreement for VINACO, the labor export company, to cremate H'Xuân's remains in Saudi Arabia. At the same time, the broker who recruited H'Xuân and other Montagnard minors for VINACO called H'Xuân's family to persuade them about cremation. Disregarding the mounting pressure, H'Xuân's mother sent off demands for investigation to the Police Department of Dak Lak Province (where H'Xuân's family resides), the Police Department of Gia Lai Province (where VINACO applied for H'Xuan's

passport), the Police Department of Thanh Hoa Province (where VINACO operates), and MOLISA. The police departments of Dak Lak and Gia Lai provinces transmitted her petitions to their Thanh Hoa counterpart, which concluded that there was not sufficient evidence for criminal investigation. There was no response from MOLISA.

2. On November 9, 2020, Khánh, the Labor Attaché, extracted Ms. Y Manh, a 30-years old Montagnard, and two other Vietnamese women from the Khadimat Center. When the labor export company that recruited Y Manh discovered her disappearance, it launched a public search for her. Unable to sell her to any employer, Khánh placed Y Manh with Thái Thị Hà, his accomplice, for four months before taking Y Manh home, where she took care of his newborn and did house chores. As the public search for Y Manh intensified, on September 30, Khánh dropped her at the SAKAN Center. Soon afterwards, the police in Vietnam summoned A Ngoai, a Montagnard Christian who was helping Y Manh's parents with a petition for her repatriation, for interrogation. They questioned A Ngoai about the source of the draft petition. Yesterday, the police resumed their interrogation of A Ngoai.

3. On April 11, 2021, Ms. H'Thai Ayun and eight Vietnamese residents of SAKAN Center went on Facebook to beg the Vietnamese government to bring them home. The following day, Khánh, the Labor Attaché, confronted this group at the SAKAN Center, accusing them of defaming the Vietnamese government and threatening H'Thai with imprisonment for having violated the laws of both Saudi Arabia and Vietnam.

The pattern is clear: no prosecution of the traffickers in Vietnam or Saudi Arabia. Identified brokers that recruited minors, labor export companies that trafficked and/or re-trafficked domestic workers, and members of Vietnamese-run trafficking rings in Saudi Arabia are doing business as usual. Khánh, the Labor Attaché, continues to have access to Vietnamese migrant workers, including some of his victims.

Recommendations

Instead of evaluating Vietnam's efforts to combat human trafficking, particularly labor trafficking, on the basis of a written plan and promised improvements, a better indicator would be its implementation of current domestic laws and provisions of the Palermo Protocol to protect victims, prosecute perpetrators, and prevent more of its citizens from becoming victims. We recommend using cases in Saudi Arabia as the litmus test for the following reasons.

1. Vietnamese-run trafficking rings in Saudi Arabia are increasingly resorting to re-trafficking victims who have no prospect of repatriation due to travel restrictions. We anticipate a drastic increase in the number of identified victims over the next six months.
2. Saudi Arabia's Human Rights Council and national police have been highly responsive to rescue requests and provided effective protection to rescued victims.
3. Victims, while outside of Vietnam, are more open to offer information about their traffickers, information that would enhance our understanding of how trafficking syndicates operate under or alongside Vietnam's labor export program.

The ranking of Vietnam in the next TIP report should be based on that country's efforts to rescue and protect already identified victims; investigate and prosecute already named perpetrators and secure compensations for their victims; inform the public of known, on-going risks and unscrupulous practices in the labor export program; and demonstrate meaningful cooperation with international agencies, the Saudi authorities, and NGOs such as CAMSA.

My organization stands ready to provide this Committee and the TIP Office with documented cases of trafficked victims as they are identified. We are willing to set up physical presence in Saudi Arabia, if permitted by the Saudi government, to locate victims and coordinate their rescue and protection with the Saudi authorities and international agencies.

APPENDIX 1

List of Labor Export Companies Sending Large Numbers of Vietnamese Maids to Saudi Arabia (underlined are those involved in the trafficking of identified victims)

ĐẦU MỐI LIÊN HỆ CÁC CÔNG TY VIỆT NAM

Tiếp theo thông báo của Đại sứ quán ngày 16/5/2021 liên quan đến việc tiếp nhận đăng ký nguyện vọng đăng ký về nước của lao động Việt Nam tại Ả-rập Xê-út, đồng thời đề trao đổi và thông tin khi cần thiết, Đại sứ quán Việt Nam tại Ả-rập Xê-út xin thông tin danh sách các đầu mối liên hệ của các công ty như sau:

| STT | TÊN CÔNG TY | THÔNG TIN LIÊN HỆ | | |
|-----|----------------------------|--------------------|--|--|
| | | Họ và tên | Số điện thoại | Email |
| 1 | THANG LONG OSC | PHẠM THỊ MÂY | Saudi 0508438676 Việt Nam 0964806524 | thanglongosc@gmail.com |
| 2 | TRANG AN - TAMICO | PHẠM THỊ LY | Việt Nam 0962155760 | lypham@tamico.com.vn |
| 3 | <u>THANH DO IET</u> | NGO THANH QUYNH | Việt Nam 0378353608 | ngothanhquynh@thanhdoiet.com.vn |
| 4 | NOSCO | LE MINH HUY | Việt Nam 0945378951 | huy_lm@noscoimast.vn |
| 5 | <u>VINH CÁT - VICA</u> | HOANG THỊ THU HANG | Việt Nam 0915387787 | hoanghang1906@gmail.com vicamanpower368@gmail.com |
| 6 | INTIME | NGUYỄN THỊ THANH | Saudi 0551636249 | info@intime.com.vn |
| 7 | <u>HAVIMEC</u> | LE ĐỨC QUY | Việt Nam 0903229374 | havimec.jsc@gmail.com |
| 8 | VINAMEX | NGÔ NHƯ QUỲNH | Việt Nam 0982554335 | quynhnm1012@gmail.com |
| 9 | <u>COLECTO</u> | TRƯƠNG THỊ HIỀN | Saudi 0557239257 | annatrungchien16@gmail.com |
| 10 | LEESCO | NGUYỄN DUY KHÁNH | Việt Nam 0932395392 | mrk2102@gmail.com |
| 11 | BẢO SƠN | NGUYỄN XUÂN HOÀNG | Việt Nam 0326217643 | dangidcmanpower.supply@gmail.com |
| 12 | CEC | TRẦN VĂN VIỆT | Việt Nam 0978686838 | cecmanpower.supply@gmail.com |
| 13 | <u>VINACO</u> | NGUYỄN DUY KHÁNH | Saudi 0598011292 | vinacoth2016@gmail.com |
| 14 | <u>NAM VIỆT</u> | TRƯƠNG THỊ HIỀN | Saudi 0546756129 | hiensaudi1985@gmail.com |
| 15 | HA NOI HTD | TRƯƠNG THỊ VINH HA | Việt Nam 0916979868 | truongha@htd.edu.vn |
| 16 | GLO-TECH | TRẦN THỊ MINH THU | Việt Nam 0985460337 | thutruminh_hanoi@yahoo.com |
| 17 | VIVASEEN | TRẦN THỊ THANH MAI | Việt Nam 0974318999 | moclan195@gmail.com |
| 18 | TRAENCO | NGUYỄN VĂN TUẤN | Việt Nam 0916115989 | xkldtraenco@gmail.com |
| 19 | <u>THUẬN AN DMC</u> | LE ĐÌNH TOÀN | Việt Nam 0986046869 hoặc 0947606868 | thuanandmc@gmail.com |
| 20 | PHÚC CHIẾN THẮNG | NGUYỄN ĐÌNH THẮNG | Việt Nam 0938836777 | thangnguyen.atc@gmail.com |
| 21 | TAMAX | LÂM XUÂN LỘC | Việt Nam 0915837888 | tamaxmanpower@gmail.com |
| 22 | <u>VIỆT NHẬT - VITECH</u> | NGUYỄN TIẾN DŨNG | Saudi 0548590485 | vietnhat@vitech.vn ngconthly39@gmail.com |
| 23 | CIPCO | NGUYỄN HAI YẾN | Saudi 0548276694 Việt Nam 01698880088 | cipcoimex@gmail.com |
| 24 | GIA VI - GV MPCS | KIỀU THỊ LINH | Việt Nam 0972265188 | giavlu@gmail.com |
| 25 | <u>VIỆT LỰC - VILUTS</u> | ĐẶNG THAI DŨNG | Việt Nam 0984482986 | info@vietluc.vn |
| 26 | INCOMEX | NGUYỄN THỊ TUYẾT | Việt Nam 01632026666 | mmota68@gmail.com |
| 27 | <u>VINAGIMEX</u> | LÊ THU HÀ | Việt Nam 0912918520 | vinagimexvietnam68@gmail.com |
| 28 | <u>BẠCH ĐĂNG - BIMEXCO</u> | ĐÌNH QUỐC TRƯỞNG | Việt Nam 0976525555 | tvienbimexco@gmail.com |
| 29 | HOANG HƯNG JSC | BUI VIỆT HƯNG | Việt Nam 0983076178 | hoanghungmanpower@gmail.com |

Trân trọng thông báo!