

Laos plays its part in the fight against human trafficking



By Meuangkham Noradeth-Vientiane Times, August 17th

The problem of human trafficking continues to be an issue of concern among legal and law enforcement officers in Laos .

Criminals involved in human trafficking often have strong links to other crime areas and operate on a trans-national level.

Dealing with this problem involves national agencies working in close cooperation with international ones. A United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report released last week contains highly disturbing information about the global spread of this crime.

The report states that nearly 40 percent of the 155 nations covered in the survey have taken little or no action to combat the problem.

The offence of “trade and abduction of human beings” was established in Laos in November

2004. In October 2005 the penal code was amended to include Article 134 defining the offence of trafficking in people and criminalising all or most of its forms.

The Lao Anti-Trafficking Unit (LAPTU) was created in 2005 as part of national law enforcement. A further six provincial anti-trafficking units were formed in 2006 and in 2007.

Twenty-seven cases of cross-border trafficking were investigated in the 2005-07 period which led to 14 convictions, the report states. The Ministry of Justice, working with UNODC, last week continued their efforts against this crime through two workshops in Paek district, Xieng Khuang province and Xamneua district, Huaphan province to further raise awareness and build capacity on human trafficking amongst legal and law en-

forcement officers.

Work to prevent and combat human trafficking is important,” said Deputy Director of Judicial Administrative System of the Ministry of Justice, Mr Somboun Vongphachanh during the workshop.

“To sell people to other people is a most serious crime,” said the UNODC Lao Country Office Representative, Mr Leik Boonwaat.

These workshops were part of a larger mission to the two provinces in which UNODC together with its government counterparts aimed to bring to the officials’ attention the seriousness of trans-national organised crime and the responses on the ground.

Topics that were presented covered Lao laws on human trafficking, the definition of human trafficking, the importance of victims’ identification and victim assistance

in combating human trafficking and special measures for child victims of human trafficking.

In addition, the participants were introduced to the Trans-national Organised Crime Convention and Trafficking in Persons Protocol, as these international instruments have been critical for the development of the Lao legal framework on human trafficking.

The R76 Project on 'Strengthening of the Legal Law Enforcement Institutions to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking' was initiated in September 2006.

Since then the project has worked to strengthen the capacity of criminal justice institutions including the judiciary and the government law enforcement bodies to prevent, investigate and prosecute cases of trafficking in human beings and related forms of organised crime.

Training and building capacity amongst criminal justice practitioners and law enforcement officers is a key component of this work. In 2009, the R76 project has implemented two training of trainers' workshops for its core training

group trainers to equip them with the knowledge and practical skills in order to be effective trainers.

The trainers represent a pool of expertise and are police, prosecutors, lawyers, judges and teachers – a cross-cutting group from the entire Lao criminal justice system.

In June this year these trainers conducted two awareness raising and education training workshop for their provincial counterparts in Champassak and Vientiane provinces.