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I would like to respond from the lesson learnt and long experiences of our networks of organizations providing social and legal assistance in Southeast Asia.

Social protection and assistance has been improved during the past 15 years and authorities have become more aware of the importance of protecting the rights of trafficked persons more systematically in the region. Many international agencies have invested in programmes on capacity building of government services so that they are aware of the victim center approach. Criminal justice officials including police are trained so that they can identify trafficked persons. However, there is a challenge for sustainability when these police officers are shifted to other units after their well-earned training. While our experiences have found that when trafficked women get contact with victim advocates of CSOs and peer support groups, trafficked women are more willing to fight for justice and collaborate with the police to give evidence against traffickers. Referral among CSOs in destination and origin countries has contributed to the success in recovery of trafficked persons from a traumatized situation.

Through working with migrant and trafficked women, we have found that a criminal approach in dealing with trafficked persons has had an adverse impact on the rights of trafficked persons. An early possible stage of identification which aims at effective investigation has failed to get positive responses from trafficked women. Many of the trafficked returnees mentioned that when they arrived at the borders or at the airport, they are brought directly for a long-hour interview by the police. In some countries they have to attend meetings with media without being informed. As a result, migrant women do not want to get in contact with authority for help as they are afraid that they will be forced to appear in media and this is a violation of their privacy.

This kind of situation has proved that there is an urgent need to redefine the victim center approach and emphasize the role of CSOs and peer support groups of trafficked returnees that gain trust from trafficked women.

I would like to call for attention of authorities in destination countries, to look at the reality of migration of women which mostly are in the informal sector including care work, massage work and agriculture. Most of them do not get access to regular migration because only skilled labour are considered to get permission to migrate such as under ASEAN Economic Community mostly men are in the professions included in the free labour movement. Undocumented migrants who mostly rely on the services of smugglers have to tolerate to work in exploitative situations, or sometimes face sexual abuse by employers as they do not want to be pushed back to their countries.

Officials working on victim identifications need to understand the real situation of migrants. Some women who migrate in massage work are promised to get work permits at the destination countries but end up working illegally, exploited and have no access to health care. In many cases, the consent to migrate and work has stopped authorities from conducting any support to them. Some of the migrants in agriculture in a country in Europe that travel with formal contracts and later are brought to work in the area not in the contract, when they are found by authority, they are put in detention centers as breaking the work contract without appropriate identification.

I would like to call for reconsidering the practice in many countries that putting undocumented migrants or smuggled persons in immigration detention centers or even punishing them as working

illegally. Authorities need to see the opportunity to get information of irresponsible job agencies and work closely with embassies to help support migrant women to get access to decent work and orderly migration and I believe that this is the effective way to prevent them from being trafficked in the future.

I would like to stress that respect the rights to work of migrant women is a key to end human trafficking. It is crucial to recognize the decision of women to migrate when they take the role of headed household and responsible to the livelihood of their children and the rest of family members.

Thank you for your attention

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