

# Taskforce responds to US trafficking in persons report

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SINGAPORE - The Singapore Inter-agency Taskforce on trafficking in persons (TIP) yesterday issued further rebuttals of the "inaccuracies and misrepresentations" in the United States State Department's TIP report released in June.

The taskforce had earlier disputed some of the report's assertions. Yesterday, it reiterated - in a five-page "detailed response" - that Singapore takes a proactive approach towards trafficking and that more than 40 per cent of the trafficking cases which the police investigated last year arose out of proactive enforcement efforts.

Also, about 60 per cent of the inspections by the Ministry of Manpower on foreign worker-related labour infringements arose from intelligence and proactive raids.

On the report's suggestion that the authorities delayed the publication of independent research conducted on sex trafficking, the taskforce - comprising of the various Government ministries and agencies - said this was "wholly inaccurate".

The taskforce said it was only aware of a document by ECPAT International on "Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Young People in Singapore".

It added that UNIFEM, which had sought the Government's comment on the document, decided the release date on its own, without influence from the authorities.

The TIP report had stated that the Singapore Government did not make "proactive" efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts in the Republic.

But the taskforce pointed out that the police had in fact conducted 3,608 anti-commercial sex operations last year, which led to the arrest of 94 "pimps", with such cases publicised in the media as deterrents and to raise awareness.

The TIP report also claimed that there were "no known victims" of trafficking provided with opportunities to seek medical and other services at shelters here. But the taskforce noted that seven victims were assisted by shelters for medical services, and this information had been made known to the US State Department before the report was published.

And contrary to what the TIP report asserted, all victims residing in Government shelters are allowed to move freely in and out of the shelters, except where the individual concerned faces physical threats or if there are serious concerns with witness tampering.

The taskforce also elaborated on the report's claims that fishing vessels involved in human trafficking originated in Singapore. It said yesterday: "The information received seems to suggest allegations of forced labour committed by employers who operated outside our jurisdiction."

Singapore had engaged the relevant embassies in forwarding the details of the cases while unions provided assistance in recovering the fishermen's salaries and arranged for their return home, it added.

The taskforce found that Singapore-based companies had performed the role of "administrators" for the foreign employers, who had recruited the foreign fishermen in their home countries, and did not perform "placement" activities.