SURINAME: Tier 2 Watch List

The Government of Suriname does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated significant efforts during the reporting period by increasing investigations, increasing victim identification efforts in the country’s interior, and passing two laws to regulate labor recruiters and prevent trafficking related to criminal or fraudulent recruitment. However, the government did not demonstrate increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period. Convictions and victims identified decreased, courts imposed weak sentences on convicted traffickers, and no victim referral and protection protocols were developed. Therefore Suriname remained on Tier 2 Watch List for the second consecutive year.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SURINAME
Vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking offenses and convict and punish traffickers with sufficiently stringent sentences; increase efforts to identify victims, including forced labor victims in the interior; develop and implement formal procedures for the referral of identified victims to care; hold public officials complicit in trafficking criminally accountable; conduct targeted labor inspections in risk-prone areas, such as the interior of the country; provide additional training to law enforcement, immigration, health care, labor, and judicial officials to better identify and protect victims; provide reintegration support for all trafficking victims, and offer specialized processes for assisting foreign victims; increase collaboration with and support of local civil society; and complete and implement a national anti-trafficking action plan.

PROSECUTION
The government decreased prosecution efforts. Article 334 of the criminal code criminalized all forms of trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to nine years imprisonment, which were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Police reported 10 investigations (seven for sex trafficking, three for labor trafficking), an increase from three in 2016. The prosecutor’s office initiated four new prosecutions for sex trafficking involving 11 suspects, compared with four prosecutions involving five suspects initiated in 2016. Prosecutors dropped two of the four cases during the reporting period due to insufficient evidence or a recanted testimony. The government convicted three traffickers, a decrease from five in
2016. Convicted traffickers continued to avoid serious punishment as courts issued weak penalties. The court sentenced two convicted traffickers to 12 months imprisonment with two months suspended and three years probation, and the third trafficker to 16 months imprisonment with nine months suspended and three years probation. In a separate case concluded during the reporting period, the court acquitted all three suspected traffickers. The government did not report any new investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking offenses. The 2015 investigation of Alien Affairs Department staff who sold residence permits to Hong Kong criminal networks that allegedly used the documents to exploit Chinese workers in forced labor remained open, with the Ministry of Justice and Police stating they did not expect any results from this investigation.

Police operated a specialized 15-person anti-trafficking unit (ATU) responsible for investigating cases. This unit provided training courses on awareness, identification, and management of trafficking cases for several stakeholders in different regions of the country; it also trained other specialized police units on the links between trafficking and other crimes. All incoming police recruits received basic human trafficking training as part of the police curricula. The acting chief of police signed agreements with counterparts from French Guiana and Guyana to intensify cooperation on combating cross-border crime, including human trafficking. The ATU cooperated with two embassies on investigating two separate suspected cases of trafficking; authorities found one case not to be trafficking, while the second case was still ongoing.

PROTECTION
The government maintained protection efforts. Police identified five victims of sex trafficking and no victims of forced labor, compared with five victims identified in 2016. All five victims received medical assistance, basic services, and the option to use the state-run victim shelter. All five victims opted to return home. The ATU continued oversight of the shelter and services, as NGOs claimed a lack of funding led them to cease their human trafficking work. Two foreign female trafficking victims from prior reporting periods continued to receive services and shelter from the government. The government’s inter-departmental working group, responsible for coordinating all anti-trafficking efforts, reached agreement with the Ministry of Social Affairs to add a line item in its budget to finance victim care. The working group reported continued attempts to utilize the state-owned psychiatric hospital for counseling services for trafficking victims.
The ATU assisted military police and immigration officials on identifying and interviewing potential victims, but there were no formal standard operating procedures (SOPs) for victim identification and assistance. In 2017, the ATU continued conducting random checks of international flights approximately three times a week. While brothels were not legal in Suriname, some continued to operate; the ATU performed random inspections of brothels, looking for trafficking indicators. The justice ministry launched a legalization project, aimed to register persons who entered Suriname legally but whose legal status had expired. The government claims this program serves as a tool to identify populations vulnerable to trafficking, as well as possible perpetrators. Victim identification efforts in the country’s interior were limited, but the government secured funding and assistance from an international organization to carry out anti-trafficking operations in the interior and goldmining areas with both police and military forces.

The government did not sponsor any programs to facilitate victims’ reintegration, such as a witness-protection program or long-term care. Foreign victims who cooperated with police could remain in Suriname. The government did not have legal alternatives to foreign victims’ removal to countries where they would face hardship or retribution, as they could apply to receive work or residency permits on the same basis as any foreign citizen. Victims had the option of pursuing civil suits against their traffickers, but no such cases were reported. Courts implemented a policy of obtaining testimony from victims in the early stages of judicial investigations in case victims were not available during the trial process. The government did not penalize victims for crimes committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking.

**PREVENTION**
The government maintained prevention efforts. The working group included representatives from seven government agencies and focused on awareness-raising programs, interagency coordination, and developing protocols for victim care. The working group reported evaluating the existing national strategy and associated action plan, set to expire at the end of 2018, and began redrafting both documents. During the reporting period, the ATU trained a total of 100 government officials on awareness, identification, and management of human trafficking cases in the eastern part of Suriname. The ATU remained active in the press and on social media raising awareness and warning parents about the use of social media as a tool used by traffickers to lure children. The ATU held four awareness sessions for
approximately 150 youth in four districts throughout the country. Police included trafficking awareness in its outreach campaign to youth in different districts. While the government’s trafficking hotline remained inactive, the government continued to operate a child and youth hotline; investigators did not report any cases resulting from calls during the reporting period. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex. Suriname passed two laws to regulate recruitment agencies and prevent potential cases of trafficking related to criminal and misleading recruitment. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel.

**TRAFFICKING PROFILE**

As reported over the past five years, Suriname is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children subjected to sex trafficking and men, women, and children subjected to forced labor. Reported cases of trafficking in Suriname’s remote jungle interior, which constitutes approximately 80 percent of the country, have increased in recent years; limited government presence in the interior renders the full scope of the problem unknown. Women and girls from Suriname, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Guyana, and Venezuela are subjected to sex trafficking in Suriname, including in remote and illegal gold mining camps in Suriname’s interior. Some Surinamese parents subject their daughters to sex trafficking. The influx of migrants from Haiti and Venezuela is vulnerable to trafficking. Migrant workers in agriculture and on fishing boats off Suriname’s coast are highly vulnerable to forced labor, as are children working in gold mines and informal urban sectors. Chinese associations, and allegedly some Hong Kong traffickers, recruit and subject Chinese immigrants to sex and labor trafficking in the mining, service, and construction sectors. Surinamese women in neighboring countries are vulnerable to sex trafficking. Traffickers may transport victims through Suriname’s interior to bypass official checkpoints. There are reports of corruption and local official complicity in trafficking crimes that may impede anti-trafficking efforts.