

**Suggested Remarks**  
**Steven Edminster, USAID/OEDG**  
**National Multisectoral Workshop Towards**  
**Developing Holistic and Rights-Based**  
**Interventions Against Trafficking in Persons**  
**The Richmond Hotel, Pasig City**  
**May 3, 2006, 9:15 a.m.**

Distinguished guests, partners in anti-trafficking in persons initiatives, ladies, and gentlemen.

On behalf of the United States Government and the American People, I am delighted to have this opportunity to join you for this "National Multi-Sectoral Workshop Towards Developing Holistic and Rights-based Interventions Against Trafficking in Persons". It is my great pleasure to have this chance to meet with anti-trafficking champions and practitioners both from government and NGOs from Zamboanga, Caraga, Cebu, Dumaguete, Batangas, and Manila.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) defines the rights-based approach to development as a framework that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed towards promoting and protecting human rights. The right-based approach includes elements such as:

- 1) expressed linkage to rights
- 2) accountability
- 3) empowerment
- 4) participation
- 5) non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups

Underlying the need for a rights-based approach is the recognition that as the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson said, "trafficking is a cause and a consequence of human rights violation because it violates fundamental human rights, such as the right to life, the right to dignity and security, the right to just and favorable work conditions, the

right to health, the right to equality and the right to be recognized as a person before the law. It is a consequence because it is rooted in poverty, inequality and discrimination.”

The many dimensions of trafficking in persons for various purposes including sexual exploitation, forced labor, forced marriage and adoption, both within countries and across international borders, pose a big challenge in responding effectively to this complex phenomenon. In our response, it is very important that we acknowledge trafficking in persons as a serious human rights violation. Anti-trafficking practitioners have the responsibility of ensuring that protection of human rights is at the center of measures taken to prevent, or respond to, trafficking. There is a need to develop and integrate a victim-centered and rights-based approach to anti-trafficking initiatives at all levels, from prevention and community-level actions, to

rescue and recovery, crisis intervention, case build-up, prosecution and healing and reintegration. Without such an approach, anti-trafficking work will not ultimately be effective.

The Visayan Forum Foundation, our major partner in the area of anti-trafficking here in the Philippines, has been a strong advocate of a rights-based approach, taking important steps to integrate this approach in all levels of interventions. It has been included in the training modules of VF. In particular, in March, VF supported the National Workshop on Development of a Handbook on the Rights-based Approach to Trafficking. And today, we are participating in this multi-sectoral workshop aimed at developing rights-based interventions to trafficking in persons.

During the workshop today and tomorrow, you will have the opportunity to share our experiences and contribute to the

improvement of anti-trafficking strategies and initiatives that integrate holistic and rights-based approaches. We certainly hope that your efforts will lead to more effective interventions against trafficking in persons. USAID is very pleased to assist the Visayan Forum in this important endeavor.

The battle against trafficking in persons is a high priority for the U.S. Government. The U.S. Government, through the Department of State and USAID, provided more than \$1 million to support the anti-trafficking activities in the Philippines last year. The US Government provided grants to partner NGOs to raise public awareness of the human trafficking problem, support the effective enforcement of the anti-trafficking law, educate law enforcement agencies and the judiciary on the provisions of the law, and provide essential services to victims such as temporary shelter, counseling, repatriation, and legal advice.

We are pleased to note that the Philippines has made headway in the fight against trafficking in persons. We believe that this is the result of the combined efforts and collective commitment of all the stakeholders - government, non-governmental organizations, private sector, the donor community, and the Filipino people themselves.

This event today is an example of our collective efforts and commitment. I am especially happy to see all of you here working hand-in-hand to address the problem of trafficking. It is our sincere hope that your continued collective efforts and determination to fight trafficking will save more Filipinos from a life of misery and abuse. We salute you all for your important work.

Maraming salamat po at mabuhay tayong lahat!