



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL  
ORGANIZATIONS, GENEVA



**NV-CDS-552-2025**

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Philippines to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Procedures Branch, and has the honor to refer to the Philippine Mission's NV-CDS-397-2025 dated 14 March 2025 on the joint communication from Special Procedures on the reported cases of trafficking in persons for purposes of forced labor, forced criminality, sexual exploitation and other violations of human rights in scam centers in Southeast Asia (reference: AL PHL 2/2025).

The Philippine Mission further has the honor to convey the enclosed written response of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines to the abovementioned joint communication.

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Philippines to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva avails itself of this opportunity to renew to Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Procedures Branch, the assurances of its highest consideration.

Geneva, 30 June 2025

**OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

Attention : Special Procedures Branch

Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

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**Response of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines to  
Joint Communication No.AL PHL 2/2025 from the UN Special Rapporteurs  
on the Reported Trafficking of Persons**

***Philippine Government's Resolute Campaign to Eradicate all Forms of Trafficking in Persons***

The Government of the Republic of the Philippines underscores that it is implementing a Whole-of-Government approach in its relentless and concerted campaign to eradicate all forms of trafficking in persons, a transnational concern that necessitates cross-border cooperation among governments.

The Philippines' unwavering and sustained campaign in combating all forms of trafficking in persons has been recognized by the US Department of State in its Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report in 2024. **The Philippines retained its Tier 1 ranking for the ninth consecutive year**<sup>1</sup>. The TIP report commended the Philippine Government's serious efforts to eradicate trafficking in persons during the reporting period, including the comprehensive measures spearheaded by the Inter-Agency Council against Trafficking (IACAT)<sup>2</sup>. The TIP report further recognized the Philippine Government's increased law enforcement efforts, the important role of Philippine courts in investigating and prosecuting human traffickers and the sentencing of nearly all traffickers to significant prison terms.

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the European Commission have also recognized the unyielding stance of the Philippines in combating money laundering which has been used as a conduit by international criminal syndicates to carry out transnational crimes worldwide. **The Philippines successfully exited the Financial Action Task Force Grey List in February 2025**. The European Commission (EC) also announced in June 2025 that **the Philippines would be removed from the EC's list of "high risk jurisdictions"** after the country aligned its action plans with international standards in the fight against illicit money activities.

***Philippines' Resolute Ban on POGO Operations***

In his State of the Nation Address on 22 July 2024, H.E. President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. imposed an immediate ban on Philippine Offshore Gaming Operator (POGO) operations in the Philippines. This was formalized through **Executive Order No.74 which mandated the cessation of all POGO operations in the country**. This presidential directive signified the Philippine Government's strong and resolute stance against forced criminality and transnational organized crimes, particularly those linked to cyber-enabled scams, trafficking in persons and other illicit activities.

To carry out President Marcos' directive, the Philippine Government carried out Anti-

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<sup>1</sup> The Tier 1 ranking is the highest rating given to countries that satisfy the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons under the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000.

<sup>2</sup> The IACAT is the national policy and coordinating body which monitors the implementation of the Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act with the Secretary of Justice as Chair and the Secretary of Social Welfare and Development as Co-Chair.

Trafficking in Persons (TIP) operations targeting POGOs. **High-profile raids of POGOs conducted by Philippine law enforcement authorities led to the dismantling of organized crime syndicates, arrest of traffickers and rescue of victims.** At the core of the Philippine Government's anti-human trafficking operations was the prioritization of the rights, dignity and well-being of victims in all stages of intervention from rescue to reintegration.

### ***Importance of regional and international cooperation in addressing trafficking in persons***

The Philippines recognizes the importance of strengthening regional and international cooperation in combating trafficking in persons. **The Philippines is a ratifying state to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and its supplemental protocols, namely the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (Palermo Protocol) and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air.**

In international fora, the Philippines has consistently called on UN Member States, concerned UN entities and stakeholders to work together to address trafficking in persons, including through frameworks provided by the **Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons and the Global Compact for Migration.**

In ASEAN, the Philippines also played a leading role in the development of the **ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (ACTIP)** which was signed by ASEAN member states and entered into force in 2017.<sup>3</sup>

ACTIP has been pivotal in promoting enhanced coordination among ASEAN member states in combating trafficking in persons. This is complemented by the **ASEAN Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.** In the Plan of Action, ASEAN member states resolved to strengthen the rule of law and border control; intensify efforts to prosecute trafficking in persons cases; and strengthen regional cooperation based on shared responsibilities to address trafficking in persons.

The Philippine Government is also strengthening investigation and prosecution of cases involving trafficking in persons through **close coordination with INTERPOL and enhanced cooperation with other countries through Mutual Legal Assistance.**

Mutual Legal Assistance is critical in combating trafficking in persons as it enables countries to cooperate in the investigation and prosecution of cases as well as judicial proceedings across borders. Mutual Legal Assistance facilitates the identification and protection of victims of trafficking and allows for the tracing, freezing and confiscation of assets derived from trafficking in persons, thus disrupting human trafficking networks.

### ***Significance of the Philippines' Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act and its Amendments in Combating Trafficking in Persons***

Pursuant to its international commitments under the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Supplemental Protocols, the Philippines enacted **Republic Act No. 9208 known as the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act on 26 May 2003** which

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<sup>3</sup> The Philippines deposited its instrument of ratification to ACTIP with the ASEAN Secretary-General on 07 February 2017.

instituted policies and procedures for a comprehensive approach to address trafficking in persons and created the Inter-Agency Council against Trafficking (IACAT).

The passage of **Republic Act No.10364 known as the Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2012 on 6 February 2013** enabled the Philippine Government to intensify its campaign against human trafficking syndicates. R.A.10364 amended certain provisions of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act to account for evolving situations since the passage of R.A. 9208. In response to the jurisdictional challenges posed by cross-border trafficking in persons, **R.A.10364 established the extraterritorial application of anti-human trafficking laws over offenses committed by citizens or permanent residents of the Philippines and against Philippine citizens.**

Republic Act 11862 known as the **Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2022** addresses challenges such as online trafficking and requires internet service providers and social media platforms to monitor, prevent and report trafficking activities. R.A. 11862 also advocates a victim-centered approach that ensures non-prosecution of victims coerced into forced criminality.

**The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act and its Amendments reflect the Philippine Government's robust commitment in combating trafficking of persons in all its forms and addressing new and evolving challenges in the digital age. This overarching legal framework, reinforced by international standards, penalizes offenders with severity while ensuring comprehensive protection for victims of trafficking.**

#### ***Intensified Law Enforcement, Prosecutorial Action and Information Dissemination Campaign to Combat Trafficking in Persons***

The Philippine Government is intensifying law enforcement and prosecutorial action to combat trafficking in persons.

The IACAT is implementing a **National Strategic Action Plan (2023-2027)**, a comprehensive blueprint to combat trafficking in persons anchored on four pillars, namely **Prevention and Advocacy; Protection and Reintegration; Prosecution and Law Enforcement; and Partnership and Networking.**

The Department of Justice through IACAT has established **Special Task Forces for case build-up and initiation of legal proceedings through the filing of charges against incorporators and corporate officers of POGOs in collaboration with law enforcement agencies and the Philippine Anti-Organized Crime Commission (PAOCC).** In addition to the Special Task Forces, IACAT's Anti-Trafficking Task Forces have been integral in the filing of cases against POGOs.<sup>4</sup>

**As a result of intensified operations in 2024, the IACAT supported the filing of 19 cases in court, with 3 cases pending preliminary investigations and 62 more in preparation.<sup>5</sup> These cases involved violations of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act and its Amendments, Revised Penal Code and Anti-Money Laundering Act.**

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Justice Orders Nos. 512, 513, 652 662 and 790 (2024) direct IACAT prosecutors to engage in case build-ups and initiate court actions against individuals involved in POGOs.

<sup>5</sup> Source: IACAT

Arrest warrants have been issued against individuals linked to human trafficking cases associated with illegal POGOs. Additionally, **law enforcement agencies are focusing on intelligence gathering, coordinated operations and dismantling of trafficking networks.**

To strengthen border security and monitoring, **the Bureau of Immigration has issued warnings against spurious overseas job offers and illegal exit points used by trafficking syndicates.**

The Department of Justice has also adopted strong policy measures to ensure that the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking crimes are impartial, non-selective, and free from interference. Prosecutions and convictions have been enhanced through **DOJ Circular No. 20 issued in March 2023 and DOJ Circular No.15 issued in July 2024.**

**DOJ Circular 20 institutionalized the case build-up process and has been pivotal in strengthening coordination between prosecutors and law enforcement agencies from the earliest stages of investigation.** Prosecutors are required to take a proactive role in case build-up to ensure that the identification of suspects and victims is based on solid evidence and that investigations are not influenced by bias or external pressure. This approach also helps trafficking victims, any of whom may be wrongfully treated as offenders due to their involvement in scam operations under coercion.

**DOJ Circular 15 contains the 2024 Rules on Preliminary Investigations and Inquest Proceedings, which reinforce due process and impartiality in prosecutorial work.** The Circular emphasizes that prosecutors must determine probable cause solely on the basis of evidence, protecting individuals from wrongful or selective prosecution. When indicators of trafficking are present, prosecutors refer such cases to IACAT, ensuring that victims are not punished but instead receive the protection and support they need.

These policies ensure that the DOJ's response to human trafficking is legally sound, fair, victim-centered, and insulated from any improper influence or hindrance.

The Philippine Government also created the following Technical Working Groups (TWGs) to enforce the ban on POGOs:

**1. TWG on Anti-Illegal POGOs**

The TWG intensified the investigation and prosecution of violators to the full extent of the law. It also carried out deportation of violators in accordance with relevant immigration laws, rules and regulations.

**2. TWG on Employment Recovery and Reintegration**

The TWG's work includes addressing the impact of the ban on POGOs on affected sectors and reintegrating displaced Filipino workers through upskilling and reskilling.

**The Philippine Government is also actively engaged in an information campaign to caution Filipinos in the country and overseas not to subscribe to offers of work that circumvent the safeguards of the Philippine Government. Public advisories, community meetings and interviews with the media have been utilized to impart the message of increased vigilance and discernment.**

### ***Criminalization of Trafficking for Forced Criminality***

**The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act and its Amendments explicitly criminalize trafficking for forced criminality.** It covers coercion into illegal activities such as drug trafficking, fraud and cybercrimes. Harsher penalties are imposed on traffickers who force victims to engage in criminal acts. Victims forced into committing crimes are not prosecuted but treated as victims.

IACAT's specialized task forces are responsible for identifying and prosecuting traffickers involved in forced criminalities, such as trafficking in persons for fraud, online scams and illegal financial transactions. These actions signify the Philippine Government's commitment to prosecute and convict traffickers, while ensuring that victims are protected and not criminalized.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Implementation of the Principle of Non-Punishment for Victims of Trafficking***

**The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (R.A. No. 9208) including its Amendments provide explicit provisions on the protection of trafficked persons/victims, regardless of nationalities, from criminal liabilities.**

In addition, foreigners who are identified as trafficked victims, are afforded the same support services such as legal aid, counselling, and rehabilitative programs to aid their recovery and healing.

Foreign nationals who are victims of trafficking in persons are referred and endorsed by IACAT to the Bureau of Immigration for **issuance of Allow Departure Order, including waiver of immigration fees and penalties.** This is a form of implementation of the Non-Punishment Principle.

### ***Assistance for Trafficking Victims***

The Philippine Government is implementing several measures to ensure assistance for trafficking victims, including foreign nationals. These measures are:

- The Department of Foreign Affairs operates the **Assistance-to-National (ATN) program** which provides free legal aid and representation to trafficked victims to ensure that they receive proper representation and support;

The Philippine Government prioritizes the well-being of trafficked victims by guaranteeing that their return to their home countries are voluntary and well-informed. This includes in-depth evaluation of potential risks associated with returning to their countries of origin. **The Refugee and Stateless Persons Protection Unit (RSPPU) under the Department of Justice plays a vital role in ensuring protection for victims of trafficking, particularly those who may qualify for refugee or stateless status who may be at risk of exploitation.** The DOJ-RSPPU ensures trafficked victims receive legal support and representation in court.

In repatriating foreign nationals, the Philippine Government coordinates with their respective embassies and facilitates their return process. Likewise, their

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<sup>6</sup> Source: IACAT

repatriation is facilitated with the aid of international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration.

### ***Effective access to Remedies for Victims of Trafficking***

The Philippine Government provides effective access to remedies for victims of trafficking related to human rights violations through the following domestic judicial mechanisms:<sup>7</sup>

1. The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act and its Amendments, provide policies to eliminate trafficking and ensure institutional mechanisms for victim protection aligned with international standards.
2. The Department of Justice through the Victims' Compensation Program, provides financial compensation to trafficking victims.
3. IACAT coordinates efforts among government agencies to ensure legal assistance, rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficked persons.
4. Victims can access legal aid, representation and protection through specialized units within the DOJ, ensuring that their rights are upheld in court proceedings.

### ***Gender-Sensitive Guidelines on Victim Identification in Trafficking in Persons***

The Philippine Government has developed **Guidelines on Victim Identification in Trafficking in Persons**.<sup>8</sup> The Guidelines provide guiding principles, ethical and safety considerations that are used as a pre-interview checklist to help enhance the capacity of the interviewer to allay fear, build rapport and ask relevant questions in an appropriate manner.

IACAT has also issued a **Joint Memorandum Circular on the Integration of Anti-Trafficking in Persons Programs, Activities and Projects (PAPs) in Annual Gender and Development Plans and Budgets (GPBs) and GAD Accomplishment Reports (ARs)**.

### ***Active Participation of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Inter-Agency Council against Trafficking in Persons***

Three non-government organizations (NGOs) are members of the IACAT. They participate in Council Meetings where they hold equal voting power alongside national government member agencies in reviewing and approving anti-trafficking policies and resolutions.

In December 2024, **the NGO Summit** was revived and led by the three NGO representatives to IACAT. The event served as a platform for NGOs to discuss and share insights on the trends, key issues and challenges in combating human trafficking.

Moreover, **the International Organization for Migration (IOM), ASEAN-Australia Counter-Trafficking (ASEAN-ACT), Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP) and other NGOs are members of the Advocacy and Communications Committee (ADVOCOM) of the IACAT** which was primarily responsible for the implementation of the approved IACAT Advocacy and Communication Plan 2024-2028 and the conduct of research and study on the patterns and schemes of trafficking in persons for policy formulation and program direction.

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<sup>7</sup> Source: IACAT

<sup>8</sup> Source: IACAT

## ***Philippine Government's Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons Globally and at the Regional Level***

Trafficking syndicates are continuously exploiting digital platforms and adapting their methods to recruit victims through fraudulent overseas job offers, online scams and deceptive social media advertisements worldwide. These evolving tactics are making it increasingly difficult for law enforcement authorities to detect recruitment patterns, identify perpetrators and prevent exploitation. Survivors are also reluctant to come forward due to the fear of criminal prosecution especially when they have been coerced into participating in unlawful activities.

Thus, this necessitates a united front from governments in dismantling criminal networks engaged in all forms of trafficking in persons. The Philippines recognizes the importance of strengthening regional and international cooperation in combating trafficking in persons. The Philippines is a ratifying state to the **UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and its supplemental protocols, namely the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (Palermo Protocol) and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air.**

In international fora, the Philippines has consistently called on UN Member States, concerned UN entities and stakeholders to work together to address trafficking in persons, including through frameworks provided by the **Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons** and the **Global Compact for Migration.**

In ASEAN, the Philippines also played a leading role in the development of the **ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (ACTIP)** which was signed by ASEAN member states and entered into force in 2017.<sup>9</sup>

In view of the transnational nature of trafficking in persons, the Philippines considers it important to have stronger bilateral cooperation with countries where Filipinos victims have been trafficked. These agreements should establish protocols for joint investigation, information sharing, and the safe and voluntary repatriation of victims.

At the regional level, greater participation in mechanisms such as the **Bali Process Working Group on Trafficking in Persons** and **ASEAN-led dialogues** is likewise pivotal in facilitating joint case tracking, intelligence sharing, and cross-border law enforcement coordination. The Bali Process is a forum for member states to enhance collaboration in preventing, investigating and prosecuting crimes involving trafficking in persons.

**The Philippines hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Meeting of Southeast Asian National Anti-Trafficking Committees on 15 October 2024.** The event was attended by national anti-trafficking committees from Southeast Asian countries. The meeting provided a platform to foster collaboration and harmonize anti-trafficking efforts across the region. The meeting discussed topics such as addressing trafficking for forced criminality and victim identification and protection. The meeting agreed to pursue the following ways forward:

- The regional Meeting of Southeast Asian National Anti-Trafficking Committees will be an annual event;
- Explore the creation of a mechanism for expedited information sharing (formal or

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<sup>9</sup> The Philippines deposited its instrument of ratification to ACTIP with the ASEAN Secretary-General on 07 February 2017.

informal);

- Explore the conduct of joint operations;
- Explore the designation of a Focal Person per country to create an open and active line of communication and coordination at the regional level;
- Pursue the updating of laws on forced criminality; and,
- Pursue capacity enhancement for justice actors

The **Manila International Dialogue (MID)** has also raised awareness on the need for enhanced international cooperation to address trafficking in persons. **The MID created a Working Group on Emerging Issues and Trends to address evolving challenges in human trafficking.**