



SOUTH AFRICA: Ready To Tackle Human Trafficking?

By Jabulani Sikhakhane

JOHANNESBURG, Mar 24 (IPS) - The expected arrival of 350,000 football fans in South Africa for the World Cup in June has provoked fears of increased levels of human trafficking. A new study suggests that one major obstacle to preventing this is the lack of accurate information about the extent of the problem.

South Africa is believed to be a hotspot for human trafficking in Africa and the country's National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) commissioned the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) to conduct a study of the problem as part of its programme to combat trafficking, known as Tsireladzani.

Professor Carol Allais, who led the HSRC team, told IPS that the team's work was made difficult by the paucity of data on human trafficking as well as a lack of cooperation by government departments with the research team. Some departments, she said, refused the team access to information even after the NPA had written letters supporting researchers' requests.

A similar study published in 2007 by the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) also found reliable data on human trafficking in SA was sketchy because there were no official statistics.

Police records subsume data on human trafficking on a range of crimes, including abduction, kidnapping, rape, and assault.

The NPA study comes in the context of pressure from the U.S. government as well as non-governmental organisations on South Africa to implement measures to deal with trafficking. South Africa is a signatory to the Palermo Protocol, which requires it to investigate and prosecute trafficking as well as train enforcement officers and assist and protect victims.

From 2005 and 2008, the U.S. State Department cited South Africa for failure to comply fully with the minimum international standards for eliminating human trafficking - including inadequate data Collection. The U.S. may withhold non-humanitarian and non-trade related aid to countries that consistently fail to comply with international protocols.

South Africa avoided this "Tier 2" classification in 2009 based on improved efforts and commitment to make further progress in 2010 in line with its commitment to the Palermo Protocol.

NGOs have raised fears of escalated trafficking during the FIFA World Cup in June.

The lack of data on human trafficking meant that the researchers could not estimate the number of victims of trafficking, though they still attempted to highlight the major characteristics of the phenomenon.

The study, which also included Lesotho, Swaziland and Zimbabwe contained few surprises: it said that victims of trafficking were mostly women, girls and boys who were trafficked for a variety of purposes, including prostitution, pornography, as domestic servants, forced labour, and for criminal activity.



In the end, Allais said, the research team drew on the database of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) whose information is limited to the cases that the inter-governmental body has dealt with. The quality of the data from NGOs was questionable because some of these organisations inflated their numbers as part of their fundraising strategies, Allais said.

The research team recommends that South Africa embark on a major awareness and educational campaign, which will include training of people in the justice system to improve their understanding of human trafficking.

"There's a great deal of ignorance across the board," Allais said.

Other recommendations include improved patrolling of the borders; better training for labour inspectors; improved intelligence gathering; and changed visa policy for at-risk groups.

In an interview with South Africa's public broadcaster, Malebo Kotu-Rammopo, the co-ordinator of the Sexual Offences and Community Affairs unit of the NPA, said that a data base of human trafficking cases will only be set up after the passing of the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons legislation, which was submitted to parliament last week.

Kotu-Rammopo said the report will assist government sharpen its policy on human trafficking, including the design of specific mechanisms to help protect those that are most vulnerable to trafficking.
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