

Congress Sends Human Trafficking Bill to Obama

The U.S. House of Representatives voted Friday to pass a Senate-approved version of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA), paving the way for President Obama to sign into law the United States' most important tool in the fight against human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

An estimated 27 million people worldwide are victims of modern-day slavery, and human trafficking is the second largest criminal enterprise in the world, generating over \$32 billion in profits to traffickers annually.

The TVPRA reauthorizes key federal anti-trafficking programs for the next four years, provides for new partnerships with cooperating countries to protect children and prevent trafficking, adds new protections for human-trafficking victims, and provides new tools to prosecutors to go after the traffickers who exploit others.

The law expired in 2011, leaving critical programs to fight human trafficking and provide survivor services at risk. The Senate demonstrated overwhelming bipartisan support earlier this month, voting 93-5 for the TVPRA when Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT) offered it as an amendment to the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) reauthorization bill. The House approved the bipartisan VAWA and TVPRA by a vote of 286 to 138.

"Congress' renewal of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act re-asserts U.S. leadership in the effort to eradicate modern-day slavery, our greatest global human rights scourge," explained David Abramowitz, director of the Alliance To End Slavery & Trafficking (ATEST). "This is an important step toward freedom for the millions of women, men and children around the globe who are trafficked into forced labor and sex

slavery each year.

"We applaud Senators Leahy and Rubio for their steadfast leadership in the fight against modern slavery and we look forward to seeing President Obama sign this cornerstone anti-trafficking measure into law," added Abramowitz, who is also vice president for Policy & Government Relations at Humanity United.

Director of policy for the Polaris Project, Mary Ellison, says the group welcomes Congress' bipartisan support of the Violence Against Women Act and the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA).

"Today's action is a victory for us all to celebrate," Ellison said Friday. "This legislation is critical to protecting human-trafficking survivors and stopping the perpetrators of violence, exploitation and enslavement.

"All across the United States, hundreds of thousands of human trafficking victims are trapped and waiting to be free," she noted. "Congress has sent a message that these people deserve our best efforts to find them, protect them, and hold their traffickers accountable."

Marina Colby, director of Public Policy & Government Relations for ECPAT-USA, congratulated Congress "for strengthening important protections and services for survivors of human trafficking, as well as domestic and sexual violence, by reauthorizing both the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and the Violence Against Women Act.

"With the President's signature on this bill," she said, "we can continue to build a strong response against human trafficking, including enhanced services for children, and most importantly we can prevent these egregious crimes from occurring in the first place."

Vital Voices is also celebrating the passage of the

reauthorization of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, said its Global Partnership Director of Human Rights Melysa Sperber.

“In a welcome demonstration of bipartisanship, the House of Representatives put survivors of violence and exploitation first,” Sperber commented. “Today, we look forward to this important law reaching President Obama’s desk and to subsequent efforts to ensure its implementation so that perpetrators are prosecuted, survivors at home and overseas receive services, and impact-driven interventions prevent trafficking from happening in the first place.”

Avaloy Lanning, senior director for the Anti-Trafficking Program at Safe Horizon, noted that human trafficking affects people of every nationality, gender, religion, age and socio-economic class.

“It can occur in almost any industry, from manufacturing to agriculture, from health care to transportation, construction to the commercial sex trade,” Lanning said. “This sends a powerful message to victims throughout the entire country who are need of emergency shelter, case management, counseling and other essential services who can now access these programs without delay. We are now better equipped to provide critical resources and new tools in the fight against human trafficking at home and abroad.”

“We strongly applaud the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) by the House and Senate,” Free the Slaves Executive Director Maurice I. Middleberg said. “This legislation is the cornerstone of the American effort to combat the horrors of human slavery and trafficking. This action by the Congress and the President’s signature will send a strong message to people in slavery that help is on the way. It restores America’s reputation as a world leader in combating human trafficking at home and abroad.”

Neha Misra, senior specialist of Migration & Human Trafficking for the Solidarity Center, said the passage of the TVPA “affirms that the United States will continue leading the fight against forced labor and labor trafficking. The Solidarity Center supports partners around the world to advocate for greater protections for marginalized workers, who are vulnerable to forced labor, debt bondage and other forms of human trafficking.

“TVPA is one such protection and its reauthorization will send a strong message to other governments that they need to pass similarly strong legislation to protect victims of human trafficking, and do more to enforce laws to prevent the trafficking of vulnerable workers,” Misra continued.

Kay Buck, CEO of Los Angeles-based Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking, said: “As a direct victim service provider, CAST celebrates the passing of the TPVA, which will have a direct impact on protecting survivors of modern day slavery. We applaud this demonstration of bipartisan support to help survivors rebuild their lives.”

International Justice Mission also applauds Congress “for crossing party lines to renew the landmark law that gives the U.S. the essential tools to fight human trafficking both at home and abroad,” Director of Advocacy Eileen Campbell stated. “Foreign governments pay close attention to U.S. leadership on trafficking and slavery, and today the U.S. Congress has reasserted our global position in protecting the least of these—women, men and children in slavery.”

World Vision’s Senior Policy Advisor for Child Protection, Jesse Eaves, said that Friday marks “an inspiring shift in the current political rancor of Capitol Hill. To see Congress move past politics and support this bill is truly an incredible day for all of us.”

Laura Germino, anti-slavery coordinator for the Coalition of

Immokalee Workers, said the organization “welcomes the renewed passage of the TVPA, a vital tool in our fight to end forced labor in the U.S. in the 21st century. Workers who have toiled against their will in the fields will now receive the key assistance they need to bring their traffickers to justice.

“The TVPA is one step on the road to the day that the U.S. as a nation should be striving to achieve: the day when we have reached the level of prevention of all forms of modern-day slavery, and achieved Tier Zero status in the U.S. annual Trafficking in Persons Report,” she concluded.