

19.05.2020

National Coordinator on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, police General-Major, Mr. Seyfulla Azimov's Annual Report on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

Dear Mr. Chairman!

Dear Parliament Members!

As it is known, human trafficking, which violates fundamental human rights and freedoms and poses a threat to international security, is one of the criminal acts that allows criminal groups to earn large amounts of illegal income and causes millions of people to become victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (THB).

According to the latest global report on the problem in most countries, three-quarters of the identified victims are women and 30 percent are children.

The Report which covers year 2019, coincides with the 15th anniversary of the United Nations Palermo Protocol on the Prevention, Elimination and Punishment of Trafficking in Human Beings, especially Women and Children.

It is the fulfillment of the obligations arising from this international document that has led to the adoption of legislation in many countries aimed at improving the identification of victims and mechanisms for their protection, increasing the efficiency of criminal prosecution and justice. As a result, there has been an annual increase in the number of identified victims and prosecuted persons.

The operational condition in the relevant field were controlled by measures taken jointly with relevant government agencies, civil society institutions and international partners in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2019, as well as persons at risk were protected from these crimes, and THB victims were covered by physical, psychological and social rehabilitation measures.

First of all, I would like to note that a progressive working legal framework for the fight against human trafficking has been formed in our country, and relevant measures have been continued in the reporting year.

Thus, the amendments to the Migration Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan allow foreigners and stateless persons affected by human trafficking to temporarily reside in the country without paying any state fees, as well as their liability for engagement in paid employment has been removed.

Last year, Azerbaijan ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Violence, as well as mechanisms of cooperation in combating against THB have been identified in the Protocol against Trafficking in Women and Children with the relevant authorities of the Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

With the amendments to the Law on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and the Law on Youth Policy, psychological rehabilitation and psychological correction were included in the social services provided to THB victims, and young people who were victims of human trafficking were included in the risk group.

The government has taken a number of important decisions to increase the amount of one time paid subsidies (from 400 AZN to 700 AZN) intended for victims of THB during the reintegration period. Obligations of training institutions for training drivers for domestic and international passenger and cargo transportation regarding topics related to human trafficking has been defined.

Awareness-raising activities were continued and new methods and means of public information were preferred, such as the introduction of e-learning modules, seminars and campaigns on social networks.

Seminars on combating human trafficking and forced labor were organized by the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Education in secondary, vocational and higher education institutions in 55 cities and regions of the country. Law enforcement officers, representatives of local executive authorities, transport, education, social protection, employment centers, civil society, the media, health workers and entrepreneurs have been involved to these events.

With the support of the special police agency, an awareness campaign was held in Baku and campaign videos, more than 100,000 propaganda materials in different languages, as well as special programs on TV and radio channels and video portals were prepared and broadcasted.

In order to prevent women and juveniles from becoming victims of human trafficking, meetings were organized with prisoners at the relevant facilities of the Penitentiary Service, and they were provided with necessary information on the protection of their rights and freedoms.

Educational booklets prepared by the Ministry of Health were distributed in all "ASAN service" centers of the country with the support of the State Agency for Citizen Services and Social Innovations, and were posted on social networks and Internet information resources.

Within the framework of a joint project of the State Migration Service and the International Organization for Migration, seminars on the rules of staying and residence in the country, methods of protection from human trafficking and forced labor were held with the participation of more than 1,800 foreigners and stateless persons.

The awareness events were closely attended by the Ministries of Labor and Social Protection, Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs, city and district executive authorities. The Ministry of Internal Affairs awarded 18 public associations that have made a significant contribution to the organization of propaganda work, including the Coalition of Non-Governmental Organizations, civil society institutions and the Mass Media.

At the same time, the Council of State Support to Non-Governmental Organizations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan allocated 209,000 manats to 20 relevant projects submitted by non-governmental organizations, of which 105,000 manat was used to finance three shelters and five rehabilitation centers.

Representatives of government agencies and civil societies allocated with the fight against human trafficking and social rehabilitation were involved in vocational training courses, officers of special police agency participated in 51 conferences, seminars and trainings in foreign countries and within the country, as well as 17 international events as instructors.

Trainings on human trafficking also were organized in special educational institutions, as well as health, social protection and secondary education workers were involved in trainings and roundtables on rehabilitation, medical and psychological assistance to victims of human trafficking.

Propaganda has been carried out regarding recruitment of victims and potential victims of human trafficking during provided trainings for entrepreneurs, conducted jointly with foreign and local experts. At the same time specialists of special institutions for victims of human trafficking were taught the basics of providing professional medical, psychological and other assistance.

Raising of the interaction with foreign partners and organizations to a new level of quality also was kept in the center of attention in 2019.

During the meetings with the representatives of the relevant state bodies of the countries of origin and destination, they exchanged views on increasing the intensity of information exchange, simplified mechanisms for returning victims to their countries, extradition of wanted persons and other important issues.

At the same time, the prospects of cooperation in the fight against human trafficking were discussed at meetings with representatives of relevant international organizations, the United States Department of State, the Embassy of USA in Azerbaijan, the Turkish Interior Ministry.

During the reporting year, 4 facts were identified by operative-search measures carried out to prevent forced labor. The investigation revealed that 5 out of 6 victims were exploited in the construction industry in the Russian Federation, and 1 minor was subjected to forced begging in Azerbaijan. Each fact was investigated and the perpetrators were brought to court responsibility.

Inspections carried out by the Labor Relations Monitoring Center of the State Agency for Services to Citizens and Social Innovations revealed that 351 people worked at 120 construction sites without labor or service (civil) contracts. Materials collected about 4 employers were sent to the Prosecutor General's Office, and administrative fines totaling 454,000 manats were imposed in total regarding other 39.

As a result of social reforms implemented under the leadership of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, compared to 2018, the number of employment contracts concluded last year increased by 153,000 across the country, including 100,000 to the private sector - along with the elimination of informal employment, it has also been an important factor in prevention of forced labour crimes.

Another important measure in this area is the identification and administrative prosecution of 11,564 foreigners violating the rules of staying and residence in the country, and the administrative deportation of 8,093 of them.

During raids provided in order to prevent child labor, 430 children working outside the family, pedagogical and social facilities, working on the streets and begging were identified. According to carried examinations, it has been confirmed that only one of them is a victim of forced labor.

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In other cases, because of absence of corpus delicti administrative sanctions were imposed on 180 parents who failed to fulfill their responsibilities for the education of their children, as well as 670 materials were sent to commissions and other relevant organizations under the local executive authorities.

The "DOST" centers of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population monitored addresses of 78 adopted, guardianship and custody children and provided each of them with the necessary social assistance.

I would also like to note that due to the suspension of inspections of business entities in accordance with the relevant legislation, in recent years, monitoring is not carried out to detect the facts of forced labor in agriculture, catering and other areas. However, given the importance of the issue, a request was made by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to resume these inspections.

Dear Parliament Members!

During the reporting year, the activities in the field of detection of human trafficking and prosecution of the perpetrators were also purposeful.

As a result of carried out operational-search measures in 2019, 36 crimes were registered on 186 human trafficking, as well as 4 forced labor, also illegal acts relating to travel or identity documents with a purpose of human trafficking, and 4 criminal groups consisted of 10 people were rendered harmless. Also 19 persons or 54.3% were detained among 35 wanted persons. The investigation of 27 criminal cases on human trafficking and forced labor was completed, 27 accused persons (22 women, 5 men) were prosecuted, and taking into consideration prosecuted persons from previous years in total 42 human traffickers were convicted.

Among the 91 identified victims of human trafficking (85 women and 5 men and one child, 89 of them were Azerbaijan nationals and 1 was Uzbekistan and 1 was Tajikistan nationals), with a purpose of exploitation 54 were trafficked to the Republic of Turkey, 16 to State of Qatar, 8 to the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 to Russian Federation and 2 to the United Arab Emirates and 3 were exploited within the country.

78 of them were placed in the shelter of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and each of them was provided with medical, psychological and legal assistance in cooperation with the Assistance Center of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and non-governmental organizations.

As a result, 14 victims were provided with jobs, 45 were sent to vocational courses, 58 were returned to their families and each was paid a one time subsidy according to the relevant decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan (400 AZN until June 4, 2019, 700 AZN in the following period).

The children of the victims were also kept in the spotlight, 22 children were directed to the pre-school education program, 15 were provided with alimony, and 18 were assisted in obtaining the necessary documents.

6845 appeals received by the "152" telephone service in 2019 on labor activity, education, marriages with foreigners, domestic violence, temporary registration of migrants, adoption and other issues had been investigated and

legal measures had been taken, necessary explanations had been given to the initiators.

Daily monitoring of Internet information resources and mass media was carried out, information on human trafficking, its various forms and about 100 illegal actions against public morality were revealed, thoroughly investigated, and measures were taken in accordance with the legislation on 4 confirmed facts.

In total, 53 illegal actions against public morality were identified and 27 people were prosecuted and 779 people were brought to administrative responsibility.

The fight against the illegal transplantation of human organs has also been in the spotlight, and a transnational organized criminal group has been neutralized by the State Security Service.

Dear Parliament Members!

In general, in 2005-2019, when the fight against human trafficking in the Republic of Azerbaijan was carried out at the legal level, due to the strong political will of the state, institutional reforms were carried out in accordance with international practice, necessary organizational and practical measures were taken.

During this period, which is characterized by a steady rise in anti-trafficking standards, a major effort to maintain the country's economic growth, employment increase and improve in living standards are also characterized by significant results in solving the problem of human trafficking.

In those years, when three state programs were implemented, dozens of legislative acts were adopted, and our country joined to the most of international documents in the fight against human trafficking.

Civil society representatives and the media have made extensive use of public awareness of the dangers of human trafficking, and the government has supported non-governmental organizations that have taken the initiative in this area.

Over the past 15 years, 570 people have been prosecuted for 1,514 cases of human trafficking and forced labor, and 976 victims have been identified.

Of course, much remains to be done in the fight against human trafficking. The goals for the coming years are to further increase the effectiveness of criminal prosecution, operative-search and awareness-raising activities, protection and social rehabilitation of victims, and to develop international cooperation.

Necessary measures in this direction are being systematically continued in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Azerbaijan, decrees and orders of the President, and the international obligations of our country.

At the end of the report, I express my deep gratitude to you, as well as civil society and the media for your direct participation and effective cooperation in improving the legal framework for combating human trafficking, as well as the implementation of state policy in this important area.

Thank you for your attention.