

**TPPA did not influence Malaysia's upgrade in US human trafficking report, says Kerry**  
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**By Sheridan Mahavera**

Malaysia's upgrade in an influential United States human trafficking report was not done so that the country could join the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) trade pact, said US Secretary of State John Kerry.

Kerry said that the upgrade for Malaysia was based solely on improvements the Najib administration made in combating human trafficking in 2014, such as passing new laws, increasing investigations and starting a new victim protection programme.

"Let me be crystal clear. I approved the report and I had no conversation with the administration about it. The decision was based solely on the recommendations of my team.

"It was made without any regard to other considerations," Kerry told reporters in Kuala Lumpur today.

Human rights groups have decried Malaysia's improvement from Tier 2 from Tier 3 in the US' annual Trafficking in Persons (TiP) report in 2014.

They claimed that the upgrade was to enable Malaysia to sign the TPPA, which is a key policy for the administration of US president Barack Obama.

US laws prevent the country from signing trade agreements with nations that are rated Tier 3, the lowest ranking in the TiP, which is an annual report prepared by the US State Department.

The TiP is well respected by human rights groups and governments all over the world as a gauge of the problem of human trafficking.

Even with the improved ranking, Malaysia still has to take more concrete steps to fight the scourge or risk getting downgraded again, Kerry said.

"We want to work with a country that wants to make improvements, that wants to start down that road. This year it is important that Malaysia makes significant improvements."

For instance, although Malaysian authorities opened up more investigations and prosecutions in 2014, the rate of convictions on those cases was still low, Kerry said.

"We are concerned about the ratio of investigations to convictions, it is not good enough. But this allows us to work with the Malaysian government to increase convictions."

"The problem is evidence, it is hard to get evidence in these cases," Kerry said.

He added that the US government through agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), could help the Malaysian authorities improve this aspect of their investigations. – August 6, 2015.

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