

**Malaysia Remains on Tier 2 Watch List of 2016 Human Trafficking Report - DPM Zahid  
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PUTRAJAYA, July 1 (Bernama) -- Malaysia remains on the Tier 2 Watch List in the 2016 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report of the United States, said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

The report, issued by the United States Department of State in Washington yesterday, had assessed 188 countries including Malaysia in terms of the prevention, prosecution and protection aspects, he said in a statement today.

Ahmad Zahid, who is also the Home Minister, said that overall the Malaysian government welcomed the constructive criticism and recommendations contained in the report and would take the appropriate follow-up action.

"Malaysia will remain committed to combating this inhumane crime," he said.

He said the US Department of State had taken note of the efforts taken by Malaysia in strengthening existing legislation through amendments that came into force on Nov 18 last year.

He said the report also stated the process of consultations held between the government and NGOs in drafting regulations to ensure smooth implementation of the amended legislation.

These were related to allowing victims of human trafficking to move freely or live outside government shelters as well as allowing them to work in the country, he said.

Ahmad Zahid said the report mentioned the initiative taken by the Malaysian government to provide employment to victims of human trafficking in the hotel industry including financing the cost of their medical examination.

"These measures are a challenge to the country because some of the victims go missing even when they are employed," he said.

He said that to improve on the country's evaluation in the 2017 report, it had been proposed that Malaysia fully implement the regulations supporting the amendments to the existing legislation.

There were two regulations, namely freedom of movement and working in the country, which came into force on May 4 this year, he said.

"As the two regulations are still new, the impact in terms of the welfare of the victims has yet to be fully felt," he added.

Ahmad Zahid said the 2016 report proposed that cases of labour trafficking be investigated in greater

detail, especially those involving vulnerable groups such as foreign workers.

The report also stated that foreign workers, including domestic maids, be informed of their right to retain their travel document and to state this clearly in the memorandum of understanding that Malaysia would sign with the source countries, he said.

In terms of prosecution, he said, Malaysia was asked to continue to improve the number of convictions by implementing improvements in case management and communication between victims of human trafficking and the prosecution.

Government financial support for the NGOs would be subject to their capability and performance, as practised in the developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, he said.

Ahmad Zahid said the implementation of the Act would run concurrently with the National Action Plan (2016-2020) that was scheduled to be launched this month.

"Malaysia will also continue to work with its strategic partner countries including the United States to improve the prosecution aspect to increase the number of convictions for this crime in the future," he said.

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