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UGANDA (Tier 2)

The Government of Uganda does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore Uganda remained on Tier 2. These efforts included increased collaboration with other governments to combat trafficking crimes and improve victim identification, as well as funding and operating a new trafficking hotline. The government increased anti-trafficking training for law enforcement officials to implement victim-centered best practices during investigations. The government increased proactive screening of vulnerable populations, particularly in the Karamoja region. The government conducted more pre-departure training for migrant workers and investigations of exploitative labor recruitment agencies. The government acceded to the UN TIP Protocol. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government investigated and prosecuted fewer traffickers and identified fewer victims. Access to adequate services for some victims, particularly men and individuals in rural areas, remained limited, and the lack of short-term shelter and long-term housing continued to adversely affect the government's ability to protect trafficking victims. The government continued to rely on civil society to provide most victim services and did not provide adequate in-kind or financial support to these efforts. The absence of victim-witness assistance policies hindered some investigations and prosecutions; in addition, some law enforcement officials did not take a victim-centered approach in criminal proceedings, potentially discouraging victim participation.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Significantly increase the availability of short-term shelter, long-term housing, and specialized services for all trafficking victims – particularly men and victims identified in rural areas – including by partnering with and allocating increased funding to NGOs that provide victim care. * Enact victim-witness assistance legislation and implement a systemic victim-witness assistance program to increase protective services for trafficking victims participating in criminal proceedings and prevent re-traumatization. * Strengthen the partnership between police and prosecutors to more efficiently and effectively complete the judicial proceedings of trafficking cases, including increasing training on strong evidence gathering and victim-centered investigations. * Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute alleged traffickers, including complicit officials, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms. * Increase protection for Ugandan trafficking victims exploited abroad, including training Ugandan embassy staff to identify and assist victims and assigning more labor attachés to Ugandan embassies to monitor migrants' working conditions abroad. * Using the National Referral Guidelines for Management of Victims of Trafficking in Uganda (NRG), systematically and proactively identify trafficking victims by screening vulnerable populations, such as refugees, asylum-seekers, individuals in commercial sex, children in the Karamoja region, and Cuban government-affiliated professionals, for trafficking indicators and refer all trafficking victims to appropriate services. * Continue to enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment companies, including eliminating recruitment fees charged to migrant workers and holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable. * Strengthen the capacity of labor inspectors to identify and report potential trafficking crimes and refer trafficking victims to appropriate services. * Approve the establishment of the Anti-Trafficking Department in the Ugandan Police Force (UPF) and allocate sufficient funding to fulfill its mandate. * Screen any North Korean workers for signs of trafficking and refer them to appropriate services, in a manner consistent with obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 2397.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act of 2009 criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed punishments of up to 15 years' imprisonment for offenses involving adult victims and up to life imprisonment for those involving child victims. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as kidnapping.

The Coordination Office to Prevent Trafficking in Persons (COPTIP) remained responsible for compiling law enforcement data. COPTIP continued to report "incidents" related to human trafficking, which ranged from simple inquiries to full police investigations; the government did not provide a breakdown of the various categories that made up an incident or how many incidents resulted in full investigations. In 2023, the government reported investigating 1,006 incidents of human trafficking, compared with 1,200 incidents in 2022. The government reported initiating prosecutions against 589 alleged traffickers in 494 cases in 2023, compared with prosecuting 728 individuals in 589 cases in 2022. Of the 589 alleged traffickers, 373 were charged for sex trafficking, 81 for labor trafficking, 32 for sex and labor trafficking, and 103 for unspecified forms of trafficking. The government reported the continued prosecutions of 1,041 from previous reporting periods. Courts convicted 130 traffickers under the 2009 anti-trafficking act, compared with 73 convictions in 2022. Of the 130 convictions, courts convicted 68 traffickers for sex trafficking, 31 for forced labor, and 31 for unspecified forms of trafficking. Courts sentenced the majority of traffickers to prison terms ranging from four to 16 years' imprisonment. In the previous reporting period, courts often sentenced labor traffickers to less significant penalties, including fines in lieu of imprisonment. A court acquitted one defendant for unspecified reasons.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action. Observers reported police officers and immigration officials, particularly at airports and border crossings, accepted bribes to facilitate trafficking crimes or to warn traffickers of impending operations and investigations. Media and senior government officials reported high-level officials may have owned or been associated with some labor recruitment companies suspected of trafficking. In 2023, the government prosecuted 12 government officials – including police officers, prison officers, and public officials – involved in potential trafficking crimes; of the 12, three were new cases and nine were from previous reporting periods. Two of the 12 cases were dropped because of a lack of evidence, and the remaining 10 remained ongoing by the end of the reporting period.

The Criminal Investigation Directorate (CID) in the UPF and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) maintained anti-trafficking units, which were responsible for responding to trafficking crimes and coordinating between law enforcement agencies. In 2019, UPF announced the creation of an Anti-Trafficking Department in CID; however, the department remained awaiting final approval by the public service commission for the fourth consecutive year. While awaiting final approval and direct funding, the department relied on the UPF's Department of Sexual Offenses and Children Cases for resources. Officials continued to use an electronic application, set up by ODPP to facilitate communication between police and prosecutors and to share best practices for human trafficking investigations and prosecutions across the country. Law enforcement officials, in partnership with an NGO, continued to implement a mobile phone app to collect and disseminate standardized data pertaining to human trafficking investigations, prosecutions, and convictions, enabling government agencies to track trafficking cases and nationwide trafficking trends.

The government, in partnership with NGOs and international organizations, trained police, border agents, immigration officials, and community elders on the anti-trafficking law, victim-centered investigation strategies, and victim identification and referral procedures. The government continued to increase training for investigators on evidence collection to ensure strong evidence gathering in cases where survivors opted not to testify. Training sessions led by ODPP, COPTIP, and UPF reached at least 1,786 stakeholders at various levels of government. Despite training, some Ugandan police and immigration officers continued to lack an understanding of the anti-

trafficking law and may have misclassified trafficking cases as other crimes or collected insufficient evidence for trafficking cases to proceed to prosecution. Due to the limited availability of shelters and other protections, the government often quickly repatriated foreign victims before obtaining their testimony, which continued to impede the completion of trials. The government lacked resources and personnel to sufficiently address internal and transnational trafficking crimes. The government collaborated with the governments of Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Saudi Arabia, India, Indonesia, the People's Republic of China, Tanzania, Thailand, and Ethiopia on trafficking investigations and prosecutions. The government collaborated with the governments of Kenya and Tanzania to train border authorities to mitigate human trafficking through ports. Officials from the ODP, COPTIP, and UPF participated in a regional forum with officials from Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya to collaborate on several security issues, including multilateral efforts to identify and refer victims of trafficking to services.

PROTECTION

The government slightly increased victim protection efforts. The government reported identifying 1,698 victims in 2023, compared with 2,099 victims identified in 2022. NGOs and international organizations reported identifying 1,232 potential victims and providing 844 victims with various services, including medical care, shelter, counseling, family reunification, vocational training, education, legal support, and repatriation assistance. Government officials continued to use the NRG to identify trafficking victims and refer them to services. The NRG provided victim referral guidelines for stakeholders – including police, prosecutors, immigration officials, and NGOs – and described resources and recommendations for victim protection. The government continued to enhance implementation of the NRG, including by distributing copies to stakeholders and training them on its use. The government, in collaboration with an international organization, launched an online directory to connect government agencies and victims of trafficking with NGOs providing services. The government reported increasing efforts to proactively screen vulnerable populations for trafficking indicators, such as children and adults in the Karamoja region, at children's shelters, border locations, schools, and medical facilities. Identified victims were referred to authorities or NGOs for assistance.

The government continued to use the NRG, service provider directory, and the country's multisectoral victim support system to directly refer and assist victims with care. The government, in partnership with civil society organizations, provided 442 victims with various protection services, including shelter, medical services, psycho-social counseling, vocational training, and community reintegration, compared with providing 551 victims services in 2022. In addition, the government reported referring 515 victims to NGO-provided services, compared with referring 520 victims in the previous year. The government continued to operate short-term shelters in Kampala in partnership with international organizations. As in previous years, officials allowed some victims to stay at the shelters for longer periods of time to participate in criminal proceedings against traffickers. The government reported spending 180 million Ugandan shillings UGX (\$47,682) on victim services in 2023 with NGOs providing most of the dedicated funds, compared with 52 million UGX (\$13,775) in 2022. The government continued to rely on civil society to provide most victim services and did not provide adequate in-kind or financial support to these efforts. The availability of victim care remained inadequate to meet the needs of victims and accommodate the number of victims identified – especially outside the central and eastern parts of the country – and services were primarily for women and children, limiting the services available for adult male victims. Government officials and civil society reported the lack of short-term shelters and long-term housing available in the country continued to adversely affect the government's ability to adequately protect trafficking victims. In some cases, police reportedly returned child victims exploited by their guardians to their homes because of the limited availability of shelters or alternative forms of care. Because of a lack of resources and the limited availability of short- and long-term shelters, they were often overcrowded. Observers reported the government removed hundreds of children who experienced homelessness from urban areas and placed these children in overcrowded shelters; most children were victims of trafficking from the Karamoja region and exploited in forced begging. In September 2021, the Cabinet approved the establishment of shelters for vulnerable migrant workers, including potential trafficking victims, in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and

the United Arab Emirates (UAE); however, the government did not report progress made to establish these shelters for the second consecutive year. The government, in partnership with international organizations and local NGOs, continued to provide repatriation assistance to Ugandan victims exploited abroad.

The government remained without victim-witness legislation or a formal victim-witness assistance program to protect trafficking victims participating in criminal proceedings and prevent re-traumatization and generally relied on NGOs to provide these services; however, the government took ad hoc steps to protect victims absent standardized procedures, including providing transportation, physical protection, shelter, interpretation services, and legal counsel. ODPP, in partnership with local NGOs, continued to operate child-friendly interviewing rooms in eight districts where law enforcement, NGOs, and social workers could conduct forensic interviews with child trafficking victims. The absence of formal victim-witness assistance policies likely hindered some investigations and prosecutions, especially as traffickers continued to be in communication with victims, leading to threats to discourage their participation in trials; in addition, some law enforcement officials did not take a victim-centered approach in criminal proceedings, potentially re-traumatizing victims or discouraging victims from participating. The 2009 anti-trafficking law permitted foreign trafficking victims to remain in Uganda during the investigation of cases and to apply for residence and work permits, but the government did not report the extent to which it provided these services. The law permitted victims to provide testimony via video or written statement or to anonymously provide information, which the government reported routinely implementing. The law allowed victims to seek restitution and compensation in criminal and civil suits; the government reported courts ordered restitution but did not report how many cases or the amount of restitution awarded.

PREVENTION

The government minimally increased prevention efforts. In March 2024, Uganda acceded to the UN TIP Protocol. The National Task Force, led by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs with COPTIP serving as its secretariat, met regularly to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts. COPTIP continued to support the establishment of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons (PTIP) District Task Forces (DTFs) in Arua and Kyotera. The PTIP DTFs were chaired by the districts' Resident District Commissioner and comprised of police, prosecutors, cultural leaders, and civil society; COPTIP provided the PTIP DTFs with training on trafficking case coordination and held trafficking-awareness workshops. The government did not report allocating dedicated funds for the coordination of anti-trafficking activities, compared with 242 million UGX (\$64,100) in 2022. Observers continued to report COPTIP did not have sufficient staffing or funding to fulfill its mandate, hindering progress on anti-trafficking efforts. Unlike previous years, COPTIP did not publish an annual report containing general information on human trafficking and a summary of its anti-trafficking efforts. The government continued to implement its 2019-2024 anti-trafficking NAP, including by seeking input from NGOs and survivors on activities. The government, independently and in partnership with NGOs and international organizations, held various awareness campaigns for government officials, civil society, community leaders, and the public to educate stakeholders on recognizing trafficking crimes, vulnerabilities to trafficking, and victim protection measures. The Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development (MGLSD) funded and operated a new trafficking-specific hotline to identify potential victims, refer victims to care, and initiate criminal investigations; the government reported receiving at least 77 calls of potential trafficking. The government continued to support the Uganda Child Helpline (UCHL) to receive calls on crimes against children, including trafficking. However, the government did not report the number of calls of potential trafficking for UCHL. The Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control (DCIC) continued to operate a 24-hour toll-free hotline for general information, including to report trafficking crimes. COPTIP provided training to DCIC on trafficking and coordinated on trafficking-related calls; COPTIP reported the hotline received 20 to 30 calls per week related to trafficking inquiries.

The MGLSD continued to regulate labor migration and other labor-related matters, including labor trafficking, and continued efforts to improve ethical recruitment practices. The government did not

report suspending any company recruitment licenses for engaging in fraudulent and exploitative recruitment activities, compared with four suspensions in 2022. The government did not report whether any individuals were arrested for fraudulent recruitment compared to an unreported number of individuals in the previous reporting period. The government reported prosecuting two labor recruitment companies and continued five ongoing cases from previous reporting periods. The government's external employment management system, which functioned as a "one-stop" Internet portal where Ugandans could search and apply for all pre-vetted overseas employment opportunities through licensed recruitment companies, remained operational. In 2023, MGLSD conducted 71 pre-departure training sessions for Ugandan migrant workers registered through labor recruitment companies. The two-week mandatory pre-departure trainings for all Ugandan migrant workers utilizing registered labor recruitment companies included information on employment contracts, laws and regulations, health management, and cultures of destination countries. Despite efforts to improve recruitment practices and enforce regulations, observers noted insufficient funding, staffing gaps, corruption, and the continued operation of illegal recruitment agencies may have limited the effectiveness of MGLSD's overall anti-trafficking efforts. The 2021 regulations continued to allow recruiting agencies to charge migrant workers recruitment fees up to 20,000 UGX (\$5) for administrative costs and various costs for placement fees and travel preparations, such as pre-departure trainings, visa applications, and medical examinations.

The DCIC continued efforts in regulating labor recruitment, including investigating complaints against labor recruitment companies illegally holding migrant workers' passports. The MGLSD did not employ labor attaches in most Ugandan diplomatic missions abroad, hindering the government's overall ability to monitor migrant worker conditions abroad. However, the MGLSD employed a new labor attaché in the Ugandan embassy in Saudi Arabia to investigate migrant worker complaints. In May 2023, MGLSD signed a new bilateral labor agreement with Jordan that included stronger protections for domestic workers, including standardized employment contracts, prohibition of salary deductions, and mechanisms to resolve labor disputes and renew contracts.

Labor inspectors overseeing working conditions in the country received training on identifying trafficking cases and routinely reported potential trafficking crimes to law enforcement; however, labor inspectors continued to focus primarily on child labor violations. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Uganda, and traffickers exploit victims from Uganda abroad. Traffickers exploit Ugandan adults and children in labor trafficking in various industries, including agriculture, fishing, mining, street vending, hospitality, and domestic work. Traffickers also exploit women, girls, and boys in sex trafficking throughout the country, particularly in Kampala and other urban areas, in brothels, bars, residential homes, rental properties, and on the street. Children from the Karamoja region, particularly from Napak district, are especially vulnerable to trafficking because of a lack of economic and educational opportunities in the region; NGOs estimate the majority of child sex trafficking victims in Uganda are ethnically Karamojong. Traffickers, sometimes known as community "elders," also exploit children from the Karamoja region in forced begging and domestic servitude; in some cases, traffickers force children to meet them at international borders, where they organize markets to sell the children into domestic servitude or sex trafficking. In some cases, parents knowingly send their children to exploitative situations to send remittances back to the family or force their children to beg to supplement family income. Despite the reopening of most schools in 2022 after COVID-19 pandemic closures, observers report many children did not return to school and remain vulnerable to trafficking. Traffickers exploit children not attending school in sex trafficking, including online commercial sexual exploitation, and labor trafficking in domestic work and forced begging. Traffickers have increasingly returned to in-person recruitment methods. Traffickers use in-person connections and social media to advertise fraudulent job opportunities in Kampala to lure adults and children from rural areas into exploitative situations. Observers report slow-onset climate change events, such as drought and rising temperatures,

increased poverty, food insecurity, and loss of work in the Karamoja region; individuals in these situations are particularly vulnerable to trafficking.

Employment agencies based in Uganda and abroad, legal and fraudulent, recruit Ugandans to work in the Middle East – particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, the UAE, and Oman – where, at times, traffickers exploit them in forced labor in domestic work, hospitality, or construction; Ugandans who voluntarily migrate in search of employment opportunities are also vulnerable to exploitative conditions. Reports indicate traffickers in Saudi Arabia regularly sell and “trade” Ugandan domestic workers using an online marketplace. To circumvent the 2016 government ban on migrant worker travel to Oman, some licensed and unlicensed agencies sent Ugandans through Kenya and Tanzania, increasing their vulnerability to debt bondage because of higher recruitment and travel fees. Traffickers also exploit Ugandans in forced labor and sex trafficking in neighboring African countries, Asia, and North America. Several NGOs and the MGLSD reported a trafficker scam lured Ugandans to Thailand and then transported the victims to Burma where they were exploited in cyber scam operations. Traffickers target university graduates with the promise of high-paying jobs abroad; however, upon arrival in the destination country, traffickers exploit these individuals in forced labor. Children experiencing homelessness or using the streets as a source of livelihood are particularly vulnerable to trafficking abroad. Some Ugandan girls, particularly from the Karamoja region, are exploited in Kenya by business owners and employers in sex trafficking and forced labor in Nairobi’s Eastleigh neighborhood. NGOs report 34 percent of Ugandan girls are involved in early or forced marriages, increasing to 50 percent for girls in the Karamoja region. Traffickers exploit adolescent boys from the Karamoja region in cattle raiding. Observers report ISIS-Central Africa may unlawfully recruit, sometimes with parental knowledge, Ugandan children to join the non-state armed group. In previous years, criminals involved in terrorist networks lured and recruited Ugandan adults and children to Somalia via Kenya to join non-state armed groups – primarily al-Shabaab – sometimes with fraudulent promises of lucrative employment.

In 2023, the government identified foreign victims from Burundi, Eritrea, Rwanda, Kenya, and South Sudan exploited in Uganda. Uganda hosts more than 1.6 million refugees, primarily from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Traffickers exploit refugees in village settlements and urban areas in labor and sex trafficking. Uganda continues to serve as a transit point for migrants seeking work in the Middle East; traffickers exploit this transiting population in forced labor and sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit children from neighboring East African countries, including Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania, in labor trafficking, primarily in agriculture and domestic work, and sex trafficking in Uganda. Cuban government-affiliated professionals, including teachers and medical workers in Uganda, may have been forced to work by the Cuban government. Democratic People’s Republic of Korea nationals working in Uganda may be operating under exploitative working conditions and display multiple indicators of forced labor.