

Legal agencies combat human trafficking

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Laos has laws in place to punish human traffickers but the challenge is identifying and arresting them. A workshop held yesterday in Vientiane aimed to address this challenge by training lawyers, police officers, court officials and prosecutors with techniques to identify victims and perpetrators of human trafficking.

The workshop was organised by the Ministry of Justice and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). It also aimed to address issues such as victim protection, assistance, immigration status of victims and their repatriation and resettlement. Workshop organizing committee member, Richard Philippart said human trafficking was a complex issue and a number of victims did not even realise they were being trafficked and exploited by others.

Mr Philippart is also UNODC's human security and legal advisor. He said human traffickers lured victims from their homes with promises of good jobs and income but then detained them and forced them to work. In other cases, victims were illegal migrants and too scared to seek assistance from police. "We have all seen now in a number of workshops what human trafficking is about and we have all started to see the complexity of this serious crime which is not simple to identify," he said in his statement.

"Human trafficking is one of the worst violations of human rights which we all confront and it goes on unseen."

Mr Philippart said there were also some cases where victims of human trafficking did not want to provide information to officers, particularly if they had been sexually exploited. In these cases officers needed techniques to question victims sensitively.

"Our response requires strong and committed cooperation. Judiciary and law enforcement networks must be stronger and more connected and more efficient than criminal networks," he said. Mr Philippart said there were several provisions in Lao law, including criminal laws, which focused on punishing human traffickers. He also said the laws were meeting international standards to prevent human trafficking.

In past years, police have arrested brokers of human trafficking and brought them before the Lao justice system.

A UNODC officer said differentiating between illegal immigration and human trafficking was one of the major problems police faced when investigating human trafficking cases.

The ministry and the UNODC held the workshop as part of activities of their joint project to strengthen legal institutions and law enforcement agencies to combat human trafficking.

