**Kenya: Human trafficking in East Africa ignored by Obama White House**  
**By Jim Kouri**  
  
An International Office of Migration cross-border assessment of human trafficking in Kenya and its neighboring countries has revealed what it termed "highly diverse trends affecting people of all ages and both genders, and highlighting a much greater need for protection of victims."   
  
  
Critics of U.S. foreign policy in East Africa point to the surprising silence of the Obama White House since Barack Obama's father was -- and his siblings are -- citizens of Kenya.   
  
  
"I'm disappointed in our Commander in Chief for turning a blind eye to the suffering within his ancestral home," said former intelligence officer and police detective Sid Franes, himself an African-American.  
  
  
"And where are people like Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and the leaders of the NAACP? Where's their outrage?" Franes asks.  
  
  
The assessment, presented last week at an IOM regional workshop in Kenya focusing on cross-border trafficking in the East African region, found that although people initially may have traveled across borders voluntarily in search of greener pastures, they were invariably deceived by a range of actors including family, religious acquaintances, business men and retired prostitutes, into working in exploitative situations.   
  
  
In Kenya, the assessment found evidence of Rwandan, Tanzanian and Ugandan victims of trafficking, including children, working in the capital, Nairobi, as domestic laborers, in the commercial sex and hospitality sectors, and in the agricultural sector in various locations around the country.   
  
  
Victims were identified in the Kenyan-Ugandan border town of Busia, while Tanzanian children were found working as cattle herders and in motorbike repair shops in Oloitoktok on the Kenyan-Tanzanian border, as well as begging on the streets of Nairobi and Naivasha.   
  
  
In Tanzania, IOM found evidence of child trafficking from Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda for sexual exploitation, fishing, domestic servitude and agricultural labor. Adult victims were identified in the domestic sector, as well as the mining, agricultural and hospitality industries.   
  
  
The IOM assessment established that Ugandan children are trafficked to all the countries in the region with Uganda also a destination for trafficked victims from Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda. In addition, instability in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was found to be fueling the influx of trafficked children to Uganda. Victims are usually transported by road using buses, lorries and trucks. Adult victims originate from the Congo, Kenya and Rwanda in the domestic, agriculture, fishing and sex industries.  
  
  
Although information on Rwanda was scant, the country was identified as a source for victims destined for Italy, Norway and the Netherlands as well as for child victims destined for Nairobi and the Kenyan coastal city of Mombasa as domestic workers and for sexual exploitation.   
  
  
The lack of referral mechanisms providing protection and support, especially for adult victims, is a major weakness in the counter-trafficking response in the region.   
  
  
Surprisingly -- considered its history -- Rwanda is the only country in the region where the government, through the Police and the Ministry of Gender, has established shelter and hotline services to assist victims of gender violence including victims of trafficking. However the lack of appropriate referral mechanisms across its border hampers efforts to expedite the return and rehabilitation of cross-border victims.  
  
  
The findings of the assessment used by 50 senior East African government officials, civil society partners and international experts at the IOM organized workshop, led to the decision to create an IOM facilitated regional network of partners as a first step to creating a functioning referral mechanism.   
  
  
Participants also called for the implementation of a region-wide 116 emergency number -- an internationally recognized hotline number for trafficked children which is currently in use in Kenya.   
  
  
Other recommendations included: the establishment of a centralized regional database on human trafficking to include information on traffickers that can be shared with law enforcement agencies in the region; greater research to determine the scale of the problem in the region; the harmonization of anti-trafficking laws in East Africa and the development of common procedures and standards on countering human trafficking.   
  
  
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