

June 20, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20451

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We, representatives of the undersigned organizations, would like to draw your attention to the growing problem of transnational online fraud originating from Cambodia. For the last three years, the FBI has reported that the costliest form of crime reported by Americans has been online cryptocurrency investment scams. These scams cost Americans tens of billions of dollars per year¹.

These scams start with an innocuous text message, followed by an extended period of social grooming, before potential victims are introduced to fake investment schemes. These online crypto investment scams are frequently referred to as “pig butchering.” Due to the highly labor intensive nature of the prolonged social interaction these scams entail, they primarily originate from involuntary slave labor housed in call centers throughout southeast Asia. Criminal rings lure immigrants from all over the world with false offers of employment. Victims are then held against their will and forced to scam others online and over the phone.

Instances of sexual abuse, torture, and murder as instruments of control used at these call centers have been documented by your Department². The State Department has acknowledged that Cambodia is an epicenter of this organized crime, with an estimated 10,000 cybercrime slaves held in that country. The U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights estimated that as many as 100,000 people have been held against their will in scam call centers in Cambodia³.

Organized crime on this scale is not possible without the aid and protection of government and political elites. Indeed, such collaboration has been documented by independent observers.

- Radio Free Asia documented eyewitness accounts of human rights abuses at cybercrime call centers with alleged links to a business owned by a Cambodian government advisor⁴.”

¹ FBI Internet Crime Report, 2023: Pages 23—\$7.5 billion reported lost with an estimated one-in-eight frauds reported (https://www.ic3.gov/Media/PDF/AnnualReport/2023_IC3Report.pdf).

² U.S. State Department, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Pages 65-66 (https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Trafficking-in-Persons-Report-2023-Introduction-Additional-Pagesv4_FINAL.pdf).

³ U.N. OHCHR, Online Scam Operations and Trafficking into Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia: Recommendations for a Human Rights Response (2023): Page 7 (<https://bangkok.ohchr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/ONLINE-SCAM-OPERATIONS-2582023.pdf>).

⁴ Radio Free Asia, “Cambodia’s Prince Group: A business empire built on crime?” (February 16, 2024) (<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/special/prince-group/index.html>).

- Al Jazeera documented scam call center operations run out of a remote compound with alleged links to a nephew of Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen⁵.
- The Associated Press documented scam call center operations run out of a casino allegedly owned by a Cambodian Senator⁶.

Your Department designed Cambodia as a “Tier 3” country, non-compliant with the requirements of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) due to credible, documented, and widespread complicity in allowing cyber scam operations to defraud Americans of billions of dollars per year.

The Government of Cambodia does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so...corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes, including by high-level senior officials, remained widespread and endemic...Authorities did not investigate or hold criminally accountable any officials involved in widespread, credible reports of complicity, in particular with unscrupulous business owners who subjected thousands of men, women, and children throughout the country to human trafficking in cyber scam operations...⁷

Despite these unambiguous findings, the President issued a sanctions waiver for Cambodia⁸.

Cambodian law enforcement has conducted sporadic call center raids; however, industrial-scale cyber slavery continues in the open with apparent impunity.

- On May 20, 2024 an “uprising” at a scam compound in Sihanoukville was described by authorities as a “riot”⁹ that may have resulted in at least one death¹⁰.
- On June 1, 2024 a man was allegedly kidnapped in “broad day light” in front of a suspected scam call center in Phnom Penh¹¹.

We understand that the United States has many, complex strategic interests in southeast Asia. However, the primary responsibility of government is to protect its citizens. This responsibility needs to be prioritized.

⁵ Al Jazeera, “Meet Cambodia’s Cyber-Slaves” (July 15, 2022) (<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2022/8/11/meet-cambodia-cyber-slaves>).

⁶ Associated Press, “EU, UN Reschedule Launch of Anti-Human Trafficking Project in Cambodia After Questions About Venue” (May 1, 2024) (<https://apnews.com/article/cambodia-eu-united-nations-human-trafficking-f3bc1437047530cfadbed770d35ed553>).

⁷ U.S. State Department, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Cambodia (<https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/cambodia/>).

⁸ Executive Office of the President, “Memorandum on Presidential Determination with Respect to the Efforts of Foreign Governments Regarding Trafficking in Persons” (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/09/29/memorandum-on-presidential-determination-with-respect-to-the-efforts-of-foreign-governments-regarding-trafficking-in-persons-2/>).

⁹ Business Standard, “Cambodia job scam: 60 rescued 2 days after stranded Indians stage 'revolt'” (May 22, 2024) (https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/cambodia-job-scram-60-rescued-2-days-after-stranded-indians-stage-revolt-124052200564_1.html).

¹⁰ https://www.linkedin.com/posts/mark-taylor-a1b55b7_cambodia-onlinescams-humantrafficking-activity-7199705688615378944-nrot

¹¹ https://www.linkedin.com/posts/nathan-paul-southern-journalist-security-specialist_today-in-cambodia-a-man-was-filmed-being-activity-7202314065057099777-qmeh/

This Administration needs to make clear, unequivocal, and public statements that improved relations between Cambodia and the United States are contingent on closing scam call centers and repatriating cyber slaves. This position needs to be enforced through appropriate, escalating sanctions, including:

- Keeping Cambodia as a Tier 3 TVPA non-complaint country in the 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report;
- Non-renewal or narrowing Cambodia’s TVPA waiver; and
- Additional financial and other sanctions against individuals, businesses, and the Cambodian government as appropriate and effective.

The plague of transnational fraud has negatively impacted every single American and has caused life altering consequences for hundreds of thousands. Our members look forward to your diligent efforts to effectively combat this problem.

Best regards,

s/ Troy Gochenour
Investigator
GA-SO (The Global Anti-Scam Organization)



s/ Tom Walker
Executive Director
FVRO (The Fraud Victim Rights Organization)



s/ Michael Roberts
Founder
PICDO (The Public International Cybercrime Disruption Organization)



s/ Lindsey Kennedy
CEO
The Eyewitness Project



s/ Kathy Waters
Co-Founder, Executive Director
AARS (Advocating Against Romance Scammers)



s/ Robin Pugh
President
Intelligence for Good



c/o: Suzy George, Chief of Staff to Secretary Blinken (delivered electronically)

cc: Hon. Ben Cardin, Chair, Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Hon. James E. Risch, Ranking Member, Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Hon. Dick Durbin, Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee
Hon. Lindsey Graham, Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee
Hon. Ben Ray Luján, Chair, Senate Communications, Media, and Broadband Subcommittee
Hon. John Thune, Ranking Member, Senate Communications, Media, and Broadband Subcommittee
Hon. Bob Casey, Chair, Senate Special Committee on Aging
Hon. Mike Braun, Chair, Senate Special Committee on Aging
Hon. Michael McCaul, Chair, House Foreign Relations Committee
Hon. Gregory Meeks, Ranking Member, House Foreign Relations Committee
Hon. Jim Jordan, Chair, House Judiciary Committee
Hon. Jerrold Nadler, Ranking Member, House Judiciary Committee
Hon. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Chair, House Energy and Commerce Committee
Hon. Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member, House Energy and Commerce Committee
Dr. Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, U.S. Homeland Security Advisor
Cindy Dyer, Ambassador-at-Large to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons

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