

# Small victories in the battle against human trafficking.

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You are viewing page **1**

Human trafficking involves the transport and coercion of human beings into providing sexual and other services. The reluctance of many governments to admit their countries' involvement in human trafficking makes accurate data collection and understanding of the problem difficult, but the U.S. State

Department estimates that 600,000-800,000 men, women, and children are trafficked across international borders each year, about 80 percent of them women and girls and up to 50 percent minors. Nearly every country in the world is affected by the human trafficking trade, according to a report released by the United Nations on April 24. Ultimately it is a human rights issue, argues Carol Yost, director of the [Asia](#) Foundation's Women's Empowerment Program.

In Asia, at least, the fight against human trafficking is making gains, according to Yost. Speaking recently in Washington, D.C., she admitted that international efforts to thwart the activity are still in the preliminary stages. But the proliferation of small-scale initiatives as well as the recent high-profile media attention to these issues, in Asia and internationally, are significant signs of progress, Yost argued. Countries are increasingly adopting legislation on the issue, and there were 438 prosecutions and 338 convictions in East Asia in 2004, according to the State Department--an enormous victory in a region where some countries previously did not have a single prosecution.

Education, too, is an area that has shown tremendous improvement in recent years, said Yost, though more work is needed. The Asia Foundation launched an English and Thai website to provide local judges and prosecutors in Thailand an opportunity to learn about the laws and issues surrounding trafficking. Many Thai prosecutors have acknowledged that they did not know what trafficking is, much less how to address it.

This and other creative initiatives in Indonesia, Laos, [Nepal](#), the Philippines, Vietnam, and elsewhere are being replicated across international borders. Such regional coordination, Yost stressed, is desperately needed to address human trafficking on a large scale. Coordination is also essential at the local level among people and organizations who can address the varying needs of trafficking victims, including shelters, hospitals, prosecutors, and police. The increased availability of the Internet in many Asian countries is helping this cause by providing access to information and assistance.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, human trafficking poses a host of problems for sustainable development and the rule of law, as illicit profits feed corruption, other criminal activities, and sometimes terrorism. The assistance, support, and rehabilitation of victims are also significant problems, particularly in countries where resources are limited, and in the case of trafficked children, where the need is most acute. Additionally, the spread of HIV/AIDS among victims trafficked into prostitution makes victim support and repatriation a public health issue.