

SSNDs meet with Rep. Jim Himes, CT-04 regarding Trans Pacific Partnership

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Rep. Jim Himes, CT-04

As members of the religious community, School Sisters of Notre Dame Ethel Howley and Jeannette Blatz were invited to meet with Rep. Jim Himes, CT-04 on August 24, 2015, to provide their human rights perspective, particularly regarding human trafficking in Malaysia. Human trafficking is one of the Atlantic-Midwest Province's four commitments flowing from the Acts of the 23rd Chapter.

Also at the meeting were Martin Mador, CT Sierra Club Legislative and Political Chair; Doug Sutherland, Friends of the Earth, Citizens Trade Campaign; and Eryn Bingle, Special Counsel for Economic Development for Jim Himes.

Highlights of the 45 minute meeting follow.

- Understanding why Malaysia had been moved from tier 3 to tier 2 in the Trafficking In Person (TIP) report.

Rep. Himes indicated that he had written to the State Department for an answer which he had received but had not yet read. He expressed his intention to share it once he had the opportunity to review it.

- Many products produced in Malaysia are for consumption in the USA, particularly electronic devices.

Private industry's review of supply chains could help in addressing the issue of human trafficking as a

source of labor (forced labor, child labor, fees for jobs, etc.).

- The US State Department claims that Malaysia does not fully comply with the minimum standard for eliminating trafficking although it is making significant efforts to meet standards (such as reforms in its victim protection program).

More than protection is required—prevention of human trafficking and prosecution are also required.

- In 2014, Malaysia identified 186 trafficking cases to be investigated and prosecuted three.

Concern was expressed about the other 183 cases

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and the troubling statistics of the past few years. For example, between 2012 and 2014 cases to be investigated went from 190 to 89 to 186 while the prosecutions went from 21 to 9 to 3.

- No government officials were investigated, prosecuted or convicted of being complicit in trafficking, even though official corruption is believed to facilitate this activity.

Himes expressed interest in receiving more documentation on this issue.

- Himes was asked if Malaysia had presented a plan to the US State Department that included prevention, protection, and prosecution of human trafficking and whether or not this matter could be transferred.

Himes expressed great concern about local trafficking. On April 30, 2015, Himes held a Town Meeting on Human Trafficking. Speakers at the meeting were service providers in his District.

- Himes stated that he has spent a great deal of time studying environmental issues. However, he had not given time to the human rights issues connected with trade and was grateful for the interaction and information provided on human trafficking.
- The four advocates at the meeting emphasized the need for Malaysia and other countries to submit a plan on how to deal with the problem of human trafficking and stressed that the US

should demand its enforcement.

- Interest was expressed in looking for government involvement in human trafficking, at least in Malaysia.

Sister Ethel offered to research the numbers of slaves in Malaysia and other countries involved in the Trans Pacific Partnership (tpp).

At the meeting's conclusion, Sisters Ethel and Jeannette thanked Rep. Himes for the many times he has voted for legislation that reflects the values of Catholic Social Teaching.

It was agreed that information-sharing and efforts to address human rights issues would continue. ■