



HUMAN TRAFFICKING WORKING GROUP

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NEWS REPORT

Headline	Overhaul of human trafficking visas 'will help victims'
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The federal government will today announce an overhaul of human trafficking visa legislation, following claims of human rights violations under the current scheme.

The changes, which will take effect on July 1, will give trafficking victims a greater chance of gaining permanent residency in Australia in cases where their safety would be threatened were they to return to their home country. Since it was introduced in January 2004, the People Trafficking Visa Framework has been criticised by advocacy groups for its focus on the criminal justice system and apparent disregard for human rights.

Under that scheme, only victims of trafficking who agree to participate and provide "significant information" in criminal proceedings have been offered the three-year temporary visa.

The new visa system eliminates the temporary visa altogether -- victims will now be offered a permanent trafficking visa if they make any kind of contribution to a criminal investigation, and if the Immigration Department is satisfied they would be at risk if they were to return home.

Minister for Home Affairs Brendan O'Connor said the federal government was committed to fighting all forms of people trafficking, including trafficking for sexual servitude and labour exploitation.

"The changes the government is announcing today will improve the support available for victims and their families, who have often suffered greatly as a result," he said.

Nina Vallins, co-ordinator of Project Respect, said the focus of the current visa system was flawed. "This whole system is set up around the criminal justice process, not the victim's rights," she said.

Recent statistics from the UN estimated that 2.5 million people worldwide were in situations of forced labour as a result of trafficking. In 2001, the issue of human trafficking was brought to Australia's attention when Puongtong Simaplee, a Thai sex-trafficking victim who was being detained in Villawood Detention Centre, died.

It is estimated that up to 1000 women are trafficked into Australia for prostitution each year.

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