



# Progress cited, but more work ahead to end trafficking

**Annual report, released Monday, for the first time ranks the U.S. along with other countries.**

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The Kansas City Star

The United States stands with the world's top nations in its efforts to stop human trafficking but still could do a better job, according to a new report.

The finding came after a year-long examination by the State Department and was the first time U.S. officials had ranked their efforts to fight human trafficking on the same scale they use to judge other countries.

But the report released Monday also noted that the U.S. finds only a tiny fraction of the nation's human-trafficking victims, and poorly trained law enforcement authorities are some-

times unwilling to help the victims they do find.

The critique was the most closely watched portion of the 10th annual global Trafficking in Persons Report released in Washington and mirrored most of the findings of a five-day series published last year by The Kansas City Star.

"The United States takes its first-ever ranking not as a reprieve but as a responsibility to strengthen global efforts against modern slavery, including those within America," said Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

About 175 countries are ranked in this year's government report. The United States ranked in the top, or "Tier 1," category with 30 other countries, most of them

SEE TRAFFICKING | A12

# TRAFFICKING:

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FROM A1

in Western Europe.

Experts on human trafficking, however, said the State Department report was candid in pointing out weaknesses in America's complex anti-trafficking bureaucracy.

Kevin Bales, an internationally-recognized expert on human trafficking and the president of the anti-trafficking group Free the Slaves, called the report the best yet in the State Department's 10-year series of reports, which are mandated by Congress.

"It doesn't pull any punches," Bales said of the new report.

Clinton and the 373-page report she unveiled acknowledged that the U.S. was "a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to trafficking in persons, specifically forced labor, debt bondage, and forced prostitution."

The report noted that the U.S. can do much better at fighting such abuses in a number of areas. Despite significant expenditures of tax money, authorities find only a few of the human-trafficking victims thought to be in the country.

The report also said efforts to identify children who are involved in the sex trade are "not well coordinated."

The report also identified U.S. guest-worker programs as an avenue for labor traffickers and called on authorities to work harder at prosecuting such cases.

Mary Bauer, the legal director of the Southern Poverty Law Center, said the government has taken a step forward by admitting its problems.

"I appreciate that I'm not hearing from the government that everything is fine, but it doesn't do anything for exploited workers," Bauer said.

Kansas City was mentioned in the report in a short section on labor trafficking involving Jamaica. It contained the story of "Sheldon," who entered the country illegally on a guest-worker visa. Alleged traffickers then loaded Sheldon down with debt, forced him to live in

To read The Star's series on human trafficking, go to [KansasCity.com](http://KansasCity.com).

crowded apartments and made him clean rooms in some of the city's best-known hotels for little or no money.

In May 2009, local prosecutors charged the people who brought Sheldon to Kansas City as part of what the prosecutors called the largest labor-trafficking ring uncovered in U.S. history.

Overall, 22 countries were upgraded from last year's rankings. Nineteen were downgraded, including Switzerland, which U.S. officials ranked in Tier Two with such countries as Angola, Liberia and Mexico.

Thirty-one countries were rated as Tier One this year along with the United States, indicating that U.S. officials thought those countries made significant efforts to stop human trafficking. There were 28 Tier One countries in 2009.

The report listed 12 countries in Tier Three — the worst category — down from 17 in 2009. Moving out of Tier Three to a higher category were Chad, Fiji, Niger, Swaziland and Syria.

In further recognizing that the United States needs to improve its efforts, the State Department also named Laura Germino as one of its human-trafficking "heroes."

Germino coordinates the anti-slavery campaign for the Florida-based Coalition of Immokalee Workers, one of the most active anti-slavery movements in the U.S. agriculture industry.

"Human trafficking is not someone else's problem," Clinton said. "Involuntary servitude is not something we think or hope doesn't exist in our own communities."

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