

Asian Perspectives on Transnational Crime and Human Trafficking

Tuesday, April 19, 2011-Arlington, VA

The Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) welcomed four distinguished visitors to George Mason University on April 19, all of whom are currently Visiting Fellows from the Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution.

Following opening remarks by former Republic of Korea Ambassador Ho-Jin Lee, the first panelist, Nelson Yiu-mo Cheng, made his presentation. A deputy district commander of the Eastern District in the Hong Police Force, Mr. Cheng introduced the audience to his comparative work on money-laundering investigations in the U.S. and Hong Kong. Mr. Cheng found that money laundering laws in the U.S. are restrictive compared to those of Hong Kong, while the asset forfeiture regime in the U.S. is very comprehensive compared to that of Hong Kong. While noting that collaboration has improved between financial intelligence units and law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and Hong Kong, Mr. Cheng asserted that expanding international cooperation on money laundering cases remains a challenge for both.

Shen Haimei, a professor of anthropology at Yunnan University's Anthropological Research Institute, then spoke about migration patterns into and from China, trafficking of women across the Yunnan-Myanmar border, and China's immigration policy. Dr. Shen described China's transition over the last decade from source of immigrants to a destination country for international migrants seeking business and labor opportunities. Noting that China's "One Child" policy has resulted in a severe shortage of women, Dr. Shen pointed out the important role of female immigrants in China's labor and marriage market. Foreign brides brought in or smuggled in from North Korea, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, and elsewhere pose a challenge to China's current immigration law and policy, since Chinese authorities have had little experience in the administration of international immigrants. Increases in demands for foreign brides, both legal and illegal, has resulted in increases in human trafficking across the China-Myanmar border, which has become the main corridor for human trafficking in the Greater Mekong Subregion. Finally, Dr. Shen discussed how women are arriving in southern China from Myanmar due to that country's repressive military regime and the free trade zone in Yunnan province, as well as China's comparatively attractive welfare policies and equitable economic development practices.

The next speaker was Ta Minh Tuan, associate professor and deputy director of the Center for Foreign Policy and Regional Studies at the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam. Dr. Tuan's talk focused on how geography is to blame for the proliferation of transnational crime in Southeast Asia, as porous borders and limited state resources present immense challenges. In particular, Dr. Tuan noted that human trafficking, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, piracy, cyber crimes, and financial crimes continue to present problems for Southeast Asia. However, Dr. Tuan highlighted how the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has demonstrated that high-level cooperation can bring results in the fight against transnational crime.

Sandy Yu-Lan Yeh, an associate professor in the department of Foreign Affairs Police at the Central Police University in Taiwan, was the event's final speaker. Dr. Yeh discussed her extensive research on human trafficking in Taiwan, which is a significant destination for human

trafficking victims. Taiwan is a magnet country for human trafficking and other crimes due to the fact that many countries do not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan, which has made international cooperation problematic in terms of follow-up investigation and prosecution of transnational traffickers. Dr. Yeh also noted how traffickers abuse foreign worker permits to traffic sex workers and laborers into Taiwan. Taiwanese authorities, according to Dr. Yeh, have been responsive to international pressure on human trafficking issues, especially through the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) annual report. Taiwan's recent efforts and achievements in addressing human trafficking through a series of anti-human trafficking reforms were recognized as Taiwan was identified as the strongest Tier 1 jurisdiction in the Asia Pacific Region in the 2010 TIP Report. At the same time, Dr. Yeh argued that public awareness of human trafficking remains relatively low in Taiwan and greater political will is needed to move forward in combating this serious problem.