

The Virgin Islands Consortium

U.S. Dept. of Justice Announces Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking

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U.S. Attorney General Merrick B. Garland on Wednesday released the Justice Department's new National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking pursuant to the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act.

According to the 2020 Federal Human Trafficking Report from the Human Trafficking Institute, in 2020, U.S. Virgin Islands federal courts handled the highest number of sex trafficking cases in the United States on a per capita basis when taking population into account.

Rooted in the foundational pillars and priorities of the interagency National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, which President Biden released on Dec. 3, 2021, the Justice Department's National Strategy is expansive in scope. It aims to enhance the department's capacity to prevent human trafficking; to prosecute human trafficking cases; and to support and protect human trafficking victims and survivors, the U.S. D.O.J. said.

"Human trafficking is an insidious crime," said Attorney General Garland. "Traffickers exploit and endanger some of the most vulnerable members of our society and cause their victims unimaginable harm. The Justice Department's new National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking will bring the full force of the Department to this fight."

"The investigation and prosecution of human trafficking crimes is one of the Department's highest priorities. Federal law enforcement and prosecutors remain relentless in our efforts to bring traffickers to justice and to seek justice for the victims of these crimes," said United States Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert for the District of the Virgin Islands.

Among other things, the Justice Department's multi-year strategy to combat all forms of human trafficking will:

- Strengthen engagement, coordination and joint efforts to combat human trafficking by prosecutors in all 94 U.S. Attorneys' Offices and by federal law enforcement agents nationwide.
- Establish federally-funded, locally-led anti-human trafficking task forces that support sustained state law enforcement leadership and comprehensive victim assistance.
- Step up departmental efforts to end forced labor by increasing attention, resources and coordination in labor trafficking investigations and prosecutions.
- Enhance initiatives to reduce vulnerability of American Indians and Alaska Natives to violent crime, including human trafficking, and to locate missing children.
- Develop and implement new victim screening protocols to identify potential human trafficking victims during law enforcement operations and encourage victims to share important information
- Increase capacity to provide victim-centered assistance to trafficking survivors, including by supporting efforts to deliver financial restoration to victims.
- Expand dissemination of federal human trafficking training, guidance and expertise.
- Advance innovative demand-reduction strategies.

The department's strategy will be implemented under the direction of the National Human Trafficking Coordinator designated by the Attorney General in accordance with the Abolish Human Trafficking Act of 2017, the release stated.

If you believe that you or someone you know may be a victim of human trafficking, please contact the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline at 1-888-373-7888, or Text 233733.