



July 28, 2020

The Honorable Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite  
Secretary of the Navy  
1000 Navy Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20350

Dear Secretary Braithwaite:

We write with deep concern regarding U.S. Navy Sailors' involvement in human trafficking in Bahrain. As you may know, *Navy Times* and *Military Times* covered a Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) investigation into Sailors accused of trafficking individuals from Thailand to Bahrain and supporting a local sex trade.<sup>1</sup> The reports indicate that Sailors housed trafficked individuals in taxpayer-funded apartments, personally profited from the sex trade, and even confiscated individuals' passports to restrict their movement. We request immediate information on the steps you have taken to remedy the deplorable circumstances in Bahrain, combat the broader culture that allowed these crimes to flourish, and ensure that justice is delivered to trafficking survivors and their family members.

The Department of Defense's (DOD) 2014-2018 Counter Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) Strategic Plan states that "when conducting operations outside the U.S., [the Department should] engage host-nation government agencies to ensure mutual understanding of processes and procedures to enable collaboration of CTIP efforts."<sup>2</sup> While we strongly urge the Navy to leverage the entire Strategic Plan as a roadmap to be tailored to Navy operations, we emphasize this particular objective to encourage the Navy to coordinate with the government of Bahrain on enforcement of anti-trafficking laws. Bahrain's tier ranking in the Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report was recently elevated, indicating that Bahrain has an anti-trafficking enforcement structure with which the Navy can and should engage. We request information on the Navy's efforts to combat prostitution and trafficking by Navy personnel in Bahrain, including efforts to engage with local government agencies.

While officials told *Military Times* that "no new cases of trafficking, solicitation, or other such crimes have been reported among sailors in Bahrain since late 2018," we are concerned that these crimes are not confined to this location, and that trafficking metastasized out of a "shadowy

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<sup>1</sup> Geoff Ziezulewicz, "Tinder, Sailor, Hooker, Pimp: The U.S. Navy's sex trafficking scandal in Bahrain," *Military Times*, (Vienna, Virginia), June. 16, 2020, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/06/16/tinder-sailor-hooker-pimp-the-us-navys-sex-trafficking-scandal-in-bahrain/>.

<sup>2</sup> DoD Combating Trafficking in Persons Program, "Strategic Plan for Combating Trafficking in Persons," [https://ctip.defense.gov/Portals/12/Documents/Strategic\\_Plan\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ctip.defense.gov/Portals/12/Documents/Strategic_Plan_FINAL.pdf) (accessed June 26, 2020).

subculture” left unaddressed for years.<sup>3</sup> Even the perception that Navy personnel could be involved in trafficking is damaging to the local and global perception of U.S. forces. Beyond the despicable crime that Sailors were charged with, the underlying culture – often referred to as “a girl in every port” – that has allowed prostitution in U.S. Navy ports is shameful. It is evident the Navy’s zero tolerance policy against trafficking has not been effectively communicated to every echelon of commanders. We request information on the training that the Navy provided in response to this investigation and how measures to prevent future infractions are communicated down the chain of command. We strongly encourage the Navy to tailor training for locations where human trafficking is more prevalent, as it did in offering “ethics and character briefs tailored to 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet personnel”.<sup>4</sup>

In the pursuit of justice, the Navy must ensure that trafficking survivors are not victimized again by the judicial process and hold perpetrators accountable. We urge the Navy to establish formal relationships with human trafficking advocacy organizations to ensure that assistance is available for survivors involved in cases against Navy personnel, including legal support from qualified groups. To this end, we request information on how the Navy supports trafficking survivors, including the use of the memorandum of understanding with local law enforcement and nongovernmental organizations on aid for survivors, as required under Section 2.10 of DOD Instruction 2200.01.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of their decision to participate in proceedings, it is incumbent on the Navy to ensure that survivors are connected with appropriate victim services and that all Sailors who participated are subject to appropriate punishment.

In light of these concerns, we ask that you respond to the following questions:

1. What changes did the Navy make to anti-trafficking training for personnel in light of this investigation to prevent future criminal activity?
2. What metrics will the Navy implement to determine whether appropriate safeguards are in place to permanently terminate any Sailor involvement in human trafficking in Bahrain? How will these metrics be applied to other areas of responsibility?
3. How is the Navy pursuing Objective 1.2 of the Strategic Plan for Combating Trafficking in Persons of 2014-2018, regarding coordination with local governments?<sup>6</sup>
4. What steps has the Navy taken to combat the degrading “girl in every port” culture that contributes to a climate that allows these crimes?
  - a. How are these initiatives communicated down the chain of command?
5. How does the Navy encourage trafficking survivors to seek justice, while ensuring that these individuals are not victimized again in the military justice process?
  - a. Does the Navy allow trafficking survivors to testify virtually, which may increase their willingness to participate?

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<sup>3</sup> Ziezulewicz, “Tinder, Sailor, Hooker, Pimp: The U.S. Navy’s sex trafficking scandal in Bahrain.”

<sup>4</sup> Geoff Ziezulewicz, “Here’s what the Navy says it’s doing to keep sailors away from prostitutes in Bahrain.”

<sup>5</sup> DoD Instruction 2200.01, “Combating Trafficking in Persons,”

<https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/220001p.pdf?ver=2019-06-21-102951-257>.

<sup>6</sup> DoD Combating Trafficking in Persons Program, “Strategic Plan for Combating Trafficking in Persons.”

6. How has the Navy utilized memorandum of understanding with host-nation law enforcement agencies and nongovernmental organizations, required under DOD Instruction 2200.01, to support survivors of trafficking?<sup>7</sup>
7. Does the Navy require any additional authorities to establish formal partnerships with human trafficking advocacy organizations to assist survivors of international trafficking involved in cases against Navy personnel?

We look forward to your response and are committed to ensuring that the Navy has all the necessary authorities and resources to ensure that these horrific crimes never again occur at the hands of U.S. military personnel.

Sincerely,

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/s/ RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate

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/s/ KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND  
United States Senate

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/s/ TAMMY BALDWIN  
United States Senate

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<sup>7</sup> DoD Instruction 2200.01, "Combating Trafficking in Persons."