

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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U.S. CONGRESS PASSES REAUTHORIZATION OF ANTI-TRAFFICKING LEGISLATION

International Justice Mission applauds landmark bipartisan legislation.

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Washington, D.C., December 10, 2008 – On International Human Rights Day, Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, HR7311. Originally signed into law in 2000, the reauthorization bill was passed at virtually the eleventh hour of the second lame duck session of the 110th Congress after House and Senate leaders reached a compromise. President Bush is expected to sign the bill into law in the coming days.

The international human rights agency International Justice Mission applauded the efforts made by Senate and House leaders to come to agreement on the landmark piece of human rights legislation. “By passing this bill before President-elect Obama takes office, Congress has sent a strong, bipartisan message that it cares a great deal about slavery and trafficking, both at home and abroad,” said Holly Burkhalter, Vice President for Government Relations at International Justice Mission. “Members of Congress from across the political spectrum set aside their differences in order to enact legislation that makes major improvements in U.S. anti-slavery, anti-trafficking policy and practice.”

The bill increased funding for the U.S. Department of State’s Global Trafficking in Persons office (G/TIP), which coordinates the U.S. response to human trafficking and modern-day slavery, and established several policy reforms. For example, HR7311 de-links benefits and services for trafficking victims in the U.S. from the requirement that they assist with Justice Department investigations and prosecutions. The bill also allows trafficking victims in the U.S. to qualify for a T-visa without necessarily participating in law enforcement efforts, with the expectation that victims will be more likely to come forward to assist prosecutors once they are assured that they will not be deported back to countries where they were abused, exploited, and trafficked.

On the international front, the new legislation addresses an aspect of G/TIP’s annual report which ranks countries according to their effectiveness in addressing trafficking and slavery. A Tier II Watch list was created several years ago for countries that have not met minimum standards in eradicating trafficking and slavery; HR7311 now requires that any country that has been on the Tier II Watch List for more than two years receive the same sanctions that countries on Tier III receive; namely, reductions in certain forms of U.S. foreign assistance. The bill also extends criminal jurisdiction for trafficking crimes committed abroad. This provision creates extra territorial jurisdiction for the crime of trafficking, meaning that an alleged offender may be tried in the U.S. whether or not the crime was committed in the United States.

Though passage of the bill represents an important step forward in the U.S. response to trafficking and modern-day slavery, funding for U.S. programs are not nearly commensurate with the need, both domestically and abroad, noted Burkhalter. Looking forward, she said that “it is up to the Obama Administration and the new Congress to really

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bring this fight into the twenty-first century. What we need is the foreign aid equivalent of PEPFAR (the President's global emergency plan for AIDS relief) for slavery and trafficking eradication.”

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About International Justice Mission

International Justice Mission is a human rights agency that secures justice for victims of slavery, sexual exploitation and other forms of violent oppression. IJM's multi-national staff work in 12 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America to ensure that the global poor are protected from violent forms of oppression by their countries' own laws. Over the past decade, they have partnered with local authorities to secure lives of freedom for thousands victimized by slavery.

IJM's lawyers, investigators and social workers partner with local officials to respond to violent oppression by ensuring immediate victim relief; pursuing perpetrator prosecution; providing aftercare for victims as they navigate the complex process of rebuilding their lives. IJM's founding principle is the defense and protection of individual human rights for all people by bringing the law to bear on their behalf and by prosecuting perpetrators who violate local and international laws.