

Except for determinations made with reference to ITAR § 129.9(a), advisory opinions are not binding on the Department of State and may not be used in future matters before the Department.

Any person may submit requests for advisory opinions to DDTC via mail to PM/DDTC, SA-1, 12th Floor, Directorate of Defense Trade Controls, Bureau of Political Military Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC 20522.

Advisory Opinion requests, however, are preferred and processed more quickly when electronically submitted via the Defense Export Control and Compliance System (DECCS). DECCS users are also able to retrieve responses using this same system. DDTC staff members have defined the data fields which are most relevant and necessary for requests for Advisory Opinions and developed the means to accept this information from the industry in the secure system in DECCS.

Methodology

This information will be collected by mail or electronic submission to the Directorate of Defense Trade Controls.

Kevin E. Bryant,

Deputy Director, Office of Directives Management, Department of State.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

[Public Notice: 12260]

Request for Information for the 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report

ACTION: Request for Information for the 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report.

SUMMARY: The Department of State (“the Department”) requests written information to assist in reporting on the degree to which the United States and foreign governments meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons (“minimum standards”) that are prescribed by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, as amended (“TVPA”). This information will assist in the preparation of the Trafficking in Persons Report (“TIP Report”) that the Department submits annually to the U.S. Congress on governments’ concrete actions to meet the minimum standards. Foreign governments that do not meet the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so may be subject to restrictions on nonhumanitarian, nontrade-related

foreign assistance from the United States, as defined by the TVPA. Submissions must be made in writing to the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons at the Department of State by February 1, 2024. Please refer to the **ADDRESSES**, *Scope of Interest*, and *Information Sought* sections of this Notice for additional instructions on submission requirements.

DATES: Submissions must be received by 5 p.m. EST on February 1, 2024.

ADDRESSES: Written submissions and supporting documentation may be submitted by the following method:

Email: tipreport@state.gov for submissions related to foreign governments and tipreportUS@state.gov for submissions related to the United States.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

1. Background

Scope of Interest: The Department requests information relevant to assessing the United States’ and foreign governments’ concrete actions to meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons during the reporting period (April 1, 2023–March 31, 2024). The minimum standards are listed below. Submissions must include information relevant to efforts to meet the minimum standards and should include, but need not be limited to, answering the questions in the *Information Sought* section below. Submissions need not include answers to all the questions; only those questions for which the submitter has direct professional experience should be answered, and that experience should be noted. For any critique or deficiency described, please provide a recommendation to remedy it. Note the country or countries that are the focus of the submission.

Submissions may include written narratives that answer the questions presented in this Notice, research, studies, statistics, fieldwork, training materials, evaluations, assessments, and other relevant evidence of local, state/provincial, and federal/central government efforts. To the extent possible, precise dates and numbers of officials or citizens affected should be included. Questions below seek to gather information and updates from the details provided and assessment on government efforts made in the 2023 TIP Report.

Furthermore, we request information on the government’s treatment of “underserved communities,” including how the government may have systemically denied opportunities to a community to participate in aspects of

economic, social, and civic life that has led to heightened risk to human trafficking or how the government’s anti-trafficking response may have treated certain groups differently.

Written narratives providing factual information should provide citations of sources, and copies of and links to the source material should be provided. Please send electronic copies of the entire submission, including source material. If primary sources are used, such as research studies, interviews, direct observations, or other sources of quantitative or qualitative data, provide details on the research or data-gathering methodology and any supporting documentation. The Department only includes in the TIP Report information related to trafficking in persons as defined by the TVPA (Div. A, Pub. L. 106–386); it does not include, and is therefore not seeking, information on prostitution, migrant smuggling, visa fraud, or child abuse, unless such crimes also involve the elements of sex trafficking or forced labor.

Confidentiality: Please provide the name, phone number, and email address of a single point of contact for any submission. It is Department practice not to identify in the TIP Report information concerning sources to safeguard those sources. Please note, however, that any information submitted to the Department may be releasable pursuant to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act or other applicable law. Submissions related to the United States will be shared with U.S. Government agencies, as will submissions relevant to efforts by other U.S. Government agencies.

Response: This is a request for information only; there will be no response to submissions. Remuneration for responses will not be provided. In order to expend appropriated funds, there must be specific authority to do so. The Department of State has no authority to expend funds for this purpose.

Definitions: The TVPA defines “severe forms of trafficking in persons” as:

- The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act that is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age.

- Persons under age 18 in commercial sex are trafficking in persons victims regardless of whether force, fraud, or coercion were involved.

- The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining

of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion, for the purposes of involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

- Forced labor may take the form of domestic servitude, forced begging, forced criminal activity (e.g., drug smuggling), and prison labor that is not the product of a conviction in a court of law.

- Children recruited or used as soldiers or for labor or services can be a severe form of human trafficking when the activity involves force, fraud, or coercion. Children may be victims regardless of gender.

The TIP Report: The TIP Report is the most comprehensive worldwide report assessing governments' efforts to combat trafficking in persons. It represents an annually updated global assessment of the nature and scope of trafficking in persons and the broad range of government actions to confront and eliminate it. The U.S. government uses the TIP Report to inform diplomacy, to encourage partnership in creating and implementing laws and policies to combat trafficking, and to target resources on prevention, protection, and prosecution programs. Worldwide, international organizations, foreign governments, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) use the TIP Report as a tool to examine where resources are most needed. Prosecuting traffickers, protecting victims, and preventing trafficking are the ultimate goals of the TIP Report and of the U.S. Government's anti-trafficking policy.

The Department prepares the TIP Report with information from across the U.S. Government, foreign government officials, nongovernmental and international organizations, survivors of trafficking in persons, published reports, and research related to every region. The TIP Report focuses on concrete actions that governments take to fight trafficking in persons, including prosecutions, convictions, and sentences for traffickers, as well as victim identification and protection measures and prevention efforts. Each TIP Report narrative also includes prioritized recommendations for each country. These recommendations are used to assist the Department in measuring governments' progress from one year to the next and determining whether governments meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons or are making significant efforts to do so.

The TVPA creates a four-tier ranking system. Tier placement is based principally on the extent of concrete government action to combat trafficking. The Department first evaluates whether

the government fully meets the TVPA's minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Governments that do so are placed on Tier 1. For other governments, the Department considers the extent of such efforts. Governments that are making significant efforts to meet the minimum standards are placed on Tier 2. Governments that do not fully meet the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so are placed on Tier 3. Finally, the Department considers Watch List criteria and, when applicable, places countries on the Tier 2 Watch List. For more information, the 2023 TIP Report can be found at www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report.

Since the inception of the TIP Report in 2001, the number of countries included and ranked has more than doubled; the 2023 TIP Report included 188 countries and territories. Around the world, the TIP Report and the promising practices reflected therein have inspired legislation, national action plans, policy implementation, program funding, protection mechanisms that complement prosecution efforts, and a stronger global understanding of this crime.

Since 2003, the primary reporting on the United States' anti-trafficking activities has been through the annual Attorney General's Report to Congress and Assessment of U.S. Government Activities to Combat Human Trafficking ("AG Report") mandated by section 105 of the TVPA (22 U.S.C. 7103(d)(7)). Since 2010, the TIP Report, through a collaborative interagency process, has included an assessment of U.S. government anti-trafficking efforts in light of the minimum standards to eliminate trafficking in persons set forth by the TVPA.

II. Minimum Standards for the Elimination of Trafficking in Persons

The TVPA sets forth the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons as follows:

(1) The government of the country should prohibit severe forms of trafficking in persons and punish acts of such trafficking.

(2) For the knowing commission of any act of sex trafficking involving force, fraud, coercion, or in which the victim of sex trafficking is a child incapable of giving meaningful consent, or of trafficking which includes rape or kidnapping or which causes a death, the government of the country should prescribe punishment commensurate with that for grave crimes, such as forcible sexual assault.

(3) For the knowing commission of any act of a severe form of trafficking in

persons, the government of the country should prescribe punishment that is sufficiently stringent to deter and that adequately reflects the heinous nature of the offense.

(4) The government of the country should make serious and sustained efforts to eliminate severe forms of trafficking in persons.

For purposes of (4) above, the following factors should be considered as indicia of serious and sustained efforts to eliminate severe forms of trafficking in persons:

(1) Whether the government of the country vigorously investigates and prosecutes acts of severe forms of trafficking in persons, and convicts and sentences persons responsible for such acts, that take place wholly or partly within the territory of the country, including, as appropriate, requiring incarceration of individuals convicted of such acts. For purposes of the preceding sentence, suspended or significantly reduced sentences for convictions of principal actors in cases of severe forms of trafficking in persons shall be considered, on a case-by-case basis, whether to be considered an indicator of serious and sustained efforts to eliminate severe forms of trafficking in persons. After reasonable requests from the Department of State for data regarding investigations, prosecutions, convictions, and sentences, a government which does not provide such data, consistent with a demonstrably increasing capacity of such government to obtain such data, shall be presumed not to have vigorously investigated, prosecuted, convicted or sentenced such acts.

(2) Whether the government of the country protects victims of severe forms of trafficking in persons and encourages their assistance in the investigation and prosecution of such trafficking, including provisions for legal alternatives to their removal to countries in which they would face retribution or hardship, and ensures that victims are not inappropriately incarcerated, fined, or otherwise penalized solely for unlawful acts as a direct result of being trafficked, including by providing training to law enforcement and immigration officials regarding the identification and treatment of trafficking victims using approaches that focus on the needs of the victims.

(3) Whether the government of the country has adopted measures to prevent severe forms of trafficking in persons, such as measures to inform and educate the public, including potential victims, about the causes and consequences of severe forms of trafficking in persons, measures to

establish the identity of local populations, including birth registration, citizenship, and nationality, measures to ensure that its nationals who are deployed abroad as part of a diplomatic, peacekeeping, or other similar mission do not engage in or facilitate severe forms of trafficking in persons or exploit victims of such trafficking, a transparent system for remediating or punishing such public officials as a deterrent, measures to prevent the use of forced labor or child labor in violation of international standards, effective bilateral, multilateral, or regional information sharing and cooperation arrangements with other countries, and effective policies or laws regulating foreign labor recruiters and holding them civilly and criminally liable for fraudulent recruiting.

(4) Whether the government of the country cooperates with other governments in the investigation and prosecution of severe forms of trafficking in persons and has entered into bilateral, multilateral, or regional law enforcement cooperation and coordination arrangements with other countries.

(5) Whether the government of the country extradites persons charged with acts of severe forms of trafficking in persons on substantially the same terms and to substantially the same extent as persons charged with other serious crimes (or, to the extent such extradition would be inconsistent with the laws of such country or with international agreements to which the country is a party, whether the government is taking all appropriate measures to modify or replace such laws and treaties so as to permit such extradition).

(6) Whether the government of the country monitors immigration and emigration patterns for evidence of severe forms of trafficking in persons and whether law enforcement agencies of the country respond to any such evidence in a manner that is consistent with the vigorous investigation and prosecution of acts of such trafficking, as well as with the protection of human rights of victims and the internationally recognized human right to leave any country, including one's own, and to return to one's own country.

(7) Whether the government of the country vigorously investigates, prosecutes, convicts, and sentences public officials, including diplomats and soldiers, who participate in or facilitate severe forms of trafficking in persons, including nationals of the country who are deployed abroad as part of a diplomatic, peacekeeping, or other similar mission who engage in or

facilitate severe forms of trafficking in persons or exploit victims of such trafficking, and takes all appropriate measures against officials who condone or enable such trafficking. A government's failure to appropriately address public allegations against such public officials, especially once such officials have returned to their home countries, shall be considered inaction under these criteria. After reasonable requests from the Department of State for data regarding such investigations, prosecutions, convictions, and sentences, a government which does not provide such data, consistent with a demonstrably increasing capacity of such government to obtain such data, shall be presumed not to have vigorously investigated, prosecuted, convicted, or sentenced such acts.

(8) Whether the percentage of victims of severe forms of trafficking in the country that are non-citizens of such countries is insignificant.

(9) Whether the government has entered into effective, transparent partnerships, cooperative arrangements, or agreements that have resulted in concrete and measurable outcomes with—

(A) domestic civil society organizations, private sector entities, or international nongovernmental organizations, or into multilateral or regional arrangements or agreements, to assist the government's efforts to prevent trafficking, protect victims, and punish traffickers; or

(B) the United States toward agreed goals and objectives in the collective fight against trafficking.

(10) Whether the government of the country, consistent with the capacity of such government, systematically monitors its efforts to satisfy the criteria described in paragraphs (1) through (8) and makes available publicly a periodic assessment of such efforts.

(11) Whether the government of the country achieves appreciable progress in eliminating severe forms of trafficking when compared to the assessment in the previous year.

(12) Whether the government of the country has made serious and sustained efforts to reduce the demand for —

(A) commercial sex acts; and

(B) participation in international sex tourism by nationals of the country.

III. Information Sought Relevant to the Minimum Standards

Submissions should include, but need not be limited to, answers to relevant questions below for which the submitter has direct professional experience. Citations to source material should also be provided. Note the country or

countries that are the focus of the submission. Please see the *Scope of Interest* section above for detailed information regarding submission requirements.

Overview

1. What were the government's major accomplishments in addressing human trafficking since April 1, 2023? In what significant ways have the government's efforts to combat trafficking in persons changed in the past year? How have new laws, regulations, policies, or implementation strategies (e.g., substantive criminal laws and procedures, mechanisms for civil remedies, and victim-witness programs, generally and in relation to court proceedings) affected its anti-trafficking response?

2. Over the past year, what were the greatest deficiencies in the government's anti-trafficking efforts? What were the limitations on the government's ability to address human trafficking problems in practice?

3. Please provide additional information and/or recommendations to improve the government's anti-trafficking efforts overall.

4. Please highlight effective strategies and practices that other governments could consider adopting.

Prosecution

5. Please provide observations regarding the implementation of existing laws, policies, and procedures. Are there gaps in anti-trafficking legislation that could be amended to improve the government's response? Are there any government policies that have undermined or otherwise negatively affected anti-trafficking efforts within that country?

6. Do government officials understand the nature of all forms of trafficking? If not, please provide examples of misconceptions or misunderstandings. Did the government effectively provide or support anti-trafficking trainings for officials? If not, how could they be improved?

7. Please provide observations on overall anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts and the efforts of police and prosecutors to pursue trafficking cases. Is the government equally vigorous in pursuing forced labor and sex trafficking, internal and transnational trafficking, and crimes that involve its own nationals or foreign citizens? Were anti-trafficking laws equitably enforced, or were certain communities disproportionately affected?

8. Please note any efforts to investigate and prosecute suspects for knowingly soliciting or patronizing a

sex trafficking victim to perform a commercial sex act.

9. Does law enforcement pursue trafficking cases that would hold accountable private employers or corporations for forced labor in supply chains?

10. Do judges appear appropriately knowledgeable and sensitized to trafficking cases? Do they implement and encourage trauma-informed practices in their courts?

11. Were there allegations of official complicity in trafficking crimes, via contacts, media, or other sources, including of state-sponsored forced labor? If so, what measures did the government take to end such practices? What proactive measures did the government take to prevent official complicity in trafficking in persons crimes? How did the government respond to reports of complicity that arose during the reporting period, including investigations, prosecutions, convictions, and sentencing of complicit officials? Were these efforts sufficient?

12. Is there evidence that nationals of the country deployed abroad as part of a diplomatic, peacekeeping, or other similar mission have engaged in or facilitated trafficking, including in domestic servitude? Has the government vigorously investigated, prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced nationals engaged in these activities?

Protection

13. Did the government make a coordinated, proactive effort to identify victims of all forms of trafficking? If there were any new (or changes to preexisting) formal/standard procedures for screening for trafficking, including of individuals in immigration detention or removal proceedings, and for victim referral to protection services, were those procedures sufficient and how did the government implement them? Did officials effectively coordinate among one another and with relevant NGOs to conduct screenings and refer victims to care? Did the government deploy mechanisms (e.g., written procedures, policies, bureaucratic structures, survivor engagement protocols, etc.) to ensure it equitably administered victim identification and protection measures?

14. If commercial sex is legalized or decriminalized in the country, how did health officials, labor inspectors, or police identify trafficking victims among persons involved in commercial sex? If commercial sex is illegal, did the government proactively identify trafficking victims during law enforcement operations or other encounters with commercial sex establishments?

15. If the government operates or funds any trafficking-specific hotlines (including those run by NGOs), did calls to those hotlines lead to victim identification, victim referral to care, and/or criminal investigations?

16. Were there any new (or changes to preexisting) services available for victims and survivors (legal, medical, food, shelter, interpretation, mental health care, employment, training, etc.)? If NGOs provide the services, does the government adequately support their work either financially or otherwise? Did all victims and survivors of both labor and sex trafficking—regardless of citizenship, gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and physical ability—receive the same quality and level of access to services?

17. What was the overall quality of victim care? How could victim services be improved? Are services victim-centered and trauma-informed? Were services linked to whether a victim assisted law enforcement or participated in a trial, or whether a trafficker was convicted? Could victims choose independently whether to enter a shelter, and could they leave at will if residing in a shelter? Could victims seek employment and work while receiving assistance?

18. Where were child victims placed (e.g., in shelters, foster care, or juvenile justice detention centers), and what kind of specialized care did they receive?

19. What is the level of cooperation, communication, and trust between service providers and law enforcement?

20. Were there means by which victims could obtain restitution from defendants in criminal cases or file civil suits against traffickers for damages, and did this happen in practice? Did prosecutors request and/or courts order restitution in all cases where it was required, and if not, why?

21. Please provide observations on trafficking victims and survivors' ability to access justice, as they define it, and the treatment of survivors throughout the criminal legal process. How did the government encourage victims to assist in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking, and did it do so in a trauma-informed way? How did the government protect victims during the trial process and ensure victims were not re-traumatized during participation in the process? If a victim was a witness in a court case, was the victim permitted to obtain employment, move freely about the country, or leave the country pending trial proceedings? In what ways could the government increase support

for victims in prosecutions against the traffickers?

22. Did the government provide, through a formal policy or otherwise, temporary or permanent residency status, or other relief from deportation, for foreign national victims of human trafficking who may face retribution or hardship in the countries to which they would be deported? Were foreign national victims given the opportunity to seek legal employment while in this temporary or permanent residency? Were such benefits linked to whether a victim assisted law enforcement, whether a victim participated in a trial, or whether there was a successful prosecution? Does the government repatriate victims who wish to return home or assist with third country resettlement? Are victims awaiting repatriation or third country resettlement offered services? Are victims indeed repatriated, or are they deported?

23. Does the government effectively assist its nationals exploited abroad? Does the government work to ensure victims receive adequate assistance and support for their repatriation while in destination countries? Does the government provide adequate assistance to repatriated victims after their return to their countries of origin, and if so, what forms of assistance?

24. Does the government arrest, detain, imprison, or otherwise punish trafficking victims (whether or not identified as such by authorities) for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked (forgery of documents, illegal immigration, unauthorized employment, prostitution, theft, or drug production or transport, etc.)? If so, do these victims disproportionately represent a certain gender, race, ethnicity, or other group or particular type of trafficking?

Prevention

25. What efforts has the government made to prevent human trafficking? Did the government enforce any policies that further marginalized communities already overrepresented among trafficking victims, increasing their risk to human trafficking? If so, did it take efforts to address those policies?

26. If the government had a national action plan to address trafficking, how was it implemented in practice? Were NGOs and other relevant civil society stakeholders consulted in the development and implementation of the plan?

27. Please describe any government-funded anti-trafficking information or education campaigns or training, whether aimed at the public or at

specific sectors or stakeholders/actors. What strategies did the campaigns employ to ensure messaging and images did not legitimize and/or perpetuate harmful or racialized narratives and/or stereotypes about what victims, survivors, and perpetrators look like? Were campaign materials readily available, cost-free, and accessible in various languages, including braille? Does the government provide financial support to NGOs working to promote public awareness?

28. Did the government seek and include the input of survivors in crafting its anti-trafficking laws, regulations, policies, programs, or in their implementation? If so, did the government take steps to ensure input was received and incorporated from a diverse group of survivors?

29. How did the government regulate, oversee, and screen for trafficking indicators in the labor recruitment process, including for both licensed and unlicensed recruitment and placement agencies, individual recruiters, sub-brokerages, and microfinance lending operations? Did the government prohibit (in any context) charging workers recruitment fees and prohibit the recruitment of workers through knowingly fraudulent job offers (including misrepresenting wages, working conditions, location, or nature of the job), contract switching, and confiscating or otherwise denying workers access to their identity documents? If there are laws or regulations on recruitment, did the government effectively enforce them? Did the government allow migrant workers to change employers in a timely manner without obtaining special permissions?

30. Did the government coordinate with other governments (e.g., via bilateral agreements with migrant labor sending or receiving countries) on safe and responsible labor recruitment that included prevention measures to target known trafficking indicators? To what extent were these implemented? Are workers (both nationals of the country and foreign nationals) in all industries (e.g., domestic work, agriculture, etc.) equally and sufficiently protected under existing labor laws?

31. Did government policies, regulations, or agreements relating to migration, labor, trade, and investment facilitate vulnerabilities to, or incidence of, forced labor or sex trafficking? If so, what actions did the government take to ensure that its policies, regulations, and agreements relating to migration, labor, trade, border security measures, and investment did not facilitate trafficking?

32. Did the government take tangible action to prevent forced labor in domestic or global supply chains? Did the government make any efforts to prohibit and prevent trafficking in the supply chains of its own public procurement?

33. If the government has entered into bilateral, multilateral, or regional anti-trafficking information-sharing and cooperation arrangements, are they effective and have they resulted in concrete and measurable outcomes? If not, why?

34. Did the government provide assistance to other governments in combating trafficking in persons through trainings or other assistance programs?

35. What measures has the government taken to reduce the participation by nationals of the country in international and domestic child sex tourism?

Territories and Semi-Autonomous Regions

36. Please provide any information about trafficking trends and government anti-trafficking efforts in non-sovereign territories and semi-autonomous regions to prosecute traffickers, identify and provide services to victims, and prevent trafficking.

Trafficking Profile

37. Were there any changes to the country's trafficking situation, including the forms of trafficking that occur, industries and sectors in which traffickers exploit victims, countries/regions in which traffickers recruit victims, locations and regions in which trafficking occurs, and recruitment methods? Are citizens of the country identified as victims of human trafficking abroad? As COVID-19-related restrictions have lifted in many parts of the world, were there additional changes in trafficking trends?

38. What groups, including underserved communities, are at particular risk of human trafficking? Underserved communities are populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life. This term may include, but is not limited to, women and girls, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, people of African descent, racial and ethnic minorities, refugees and internally displaced people, religious minorities, LGBTQI+ persons, rural residents, migrants, as well as those who are otherwise

adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

39. Chinese/Cuban/North Korean workers: Are any of these populations subjected to or at high risk of forced labor in the country as part of government-to-government agreements and/or in foreign government-affiliated projects?

40. Please provide any information about trafficking trends, general numerical data on victims identified, or risk factors stemming from climate-related change or disasters, as well as any efforts to mitigate these vulnerabilities; the ongoing armed conflict following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine; and the use of technology to recruit and exploit victims.

Child Soldiering

41. Using the definition of "child soldier" as defined by the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008 (CSPA), describe instances, cases, and reports, including anecdotal reports, of:

a. Use of any person under the age of 18 in direct hostilities as a member of governmental armed forces, police, or other security forces;

b. Conscription or forced recruitment of persons under the age of 18 into governmental armed forces, police, or other security forces;

c. Voluntary recruitment of any person under 15 years of age into governmental armed forces, police, or other security forces;

d. Recruitment (forced or voluntary) or use in hostilities of persons under the age of 18 by armed groups distinct from the armed forces of a state.

e. Abuse of male and female children recruited by governmental armed forces, police, or other security forces, and government-supported armed groups (e.g., sexual abuse or use for forced labor). Describe the manner and age of conscription, noting differences in treatment or conscription patterns based on gender.

42. Did the government provide support to an armed group that recruits and/or uses child soldiers? What was the extent of the support (e.g., in-kind, financial, training, etc.)? Where did the provision of support occur (within the country or outside of the country)? In cases where the government was included on the CSPA list in 2023 based on its support to non-state armed groups that recruit and/or use child soldiers, describe whether the government took steps to pressure the group to cease its recruitment or use of child soldiers, publicly disavow the group's recruitment or use of child soldiers, or cease its support to that group.

43. Describe any government efforts to prevent or end child soldier recruitment or use, including efforts to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate former child soldiers. (*i.e.*, enacting any laws or regulations, implementing a United Nations Action Plan or Roadmap, specialized training for officials, procedures for age verification, etc.)

Cynthia D. Dyer,

Ambassador-at-Large, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Department of State.

[FR Doc. 2023–24781 Filed 11–8–23; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4710–11–P

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

[Docket No. FD 36727]

CSX Transportation, Inc.—Acquisition and Operation—Rail Line of Meridian & Bigbee Railroad, L.L.C.

AGENCY: Surface Transportation Board.

ACTION: Decision No. 1; Notice of acceptance of primary application; Notice of acceptance of related filings for consideration; Issuance of procedural schedule.

SUMMARY: The Surface Transportation Board (Board) is accepting the primary application (Application) filed October 6, 2023, by CSX Transportation Inc. (CSXT), and accepting for consideration two related filings. The Application seeks Board approval for CSXT to acquire and operate the assets comprising the rail line of Meridian & Bigbee Railroad, L.L.C. (MNBR) that runs approximately 93.68 miles between the cities of Burkville, Ala., and Myrtlewood, Ala., in Lowndes, Dallas, Wilcox and Marengo Counties (the Eastern Line). This proposal is referred to as the “Proposed Transaction.” The related filings are notices of exemption seeking Board approval of transactions involving trackage rights of other carriers (Related Transactions).

DATES: The effective date of this decision is November 3, 2023. CSXT is directed to supplement its Application as discussed in this decision by November 21, 2023. Any person who wishes to participate in this proceeding as a Party of Record must file, no later than November 27, 2023, a notice of intent to participate. All comments, protests, requests for conditions, and any other evidence and argument in opposition to the Application and related filings, including filings by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), must be filed by December 11, 2023. Responses to comments, protests,

requests for conditions, other opposition, and rebuttal in support of the Application or related filings must be filed by January 8, 2023. *See* Appendix (Procedural Schedule). A final decision in this matter will be served no later than 45 days after the date on which the evidentiary proceedings conclude, subject to the completion of environmental review. Further procedural orders, if any, would be issued by the Board.

ADDRESSES: Any filing submitted in this proceeding should be filed with the Board via e-filing on the Board’s website. In addition, one copy of each filing must be sent (and may be sent by email only if service by email is acceptable to the recipient) to each of the following: (1) Secretary of Transportation, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE, Washington, DC 20590; (2) Attorney General of the United States, c/o Assistant Attorney General, Antitrust Division, Room 3109, Department of Justice, Washington, DC 20530; (3) CSXT’s representative, Peter W. Denton, Steptoe & Johnson LLP, 1330 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036; (4) AGR’s and MNBR’s representative, Justin J. Marks, Clark Hill PLC, 1001 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Suite 1300 South, Washington, DC 20004; and (5) any other person designated as a Party of Record on the service list.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jonathon Binet at (202) 245–0368. If you require an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please call (202) 245–0245.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: CSXT seeks the Board’s prior review and authorization pursuant to 49 U.S.C. 11323–25 and 49 CFR part 1180 to acquire from MNBR and operate the Eastern Line. (Appl. 1.) The Eastern Line consists of two segments totaling approximately 93.68 miles: (1) extending from milepost XXB 189.00 near Burkville to milepost XXB 222.00 at Western Junction, a distance of about 30.22 miles;¹ and (2) extending from a connection with the first segment at Western Junction, milepost OOR 716.25 to milepost ORS 779.71 near Myrtlewood, a distance of about 63.46 miles. (*Id.*) The Eastern Line includes Selma Yard, at Selma, Ala., and the following stations: Myrtlewood, Linden,

Thomaston, Safford, Orville, Beloit, Selma, Industrial Lead, Tyler, Benton, Whitehall, and Burkville. (*Id.*) Two other carriers, Alabama Gulf Coast Railway LLC (AGR) and Norfolk Southern Railway (NSR) connect with the Eastern Line. AGR’s line connects to the Eastern Line at Linden, Ala. (*Id.* at 5.) AGR operates over an approximately 10-mile portion of the Eastern Line between Linden and Myrtlewood to interchange traffic with MNBR.² (*Id.*) NSR connects to the Eastern Line at Selma, where it interchanges traffic with MNBR. (*Id.* at 12.)

Prior to 2003, CSXT and its predecessors owned and operated the Eastern Line. (*Id.* at 2.) In 2003, CSXT entered into a Land Lease Agreement (2003 Agreement) with M&B Railroad, L.L.C. (M&B), which was later renamed MNBR,³ whereby CSXT: (1) sold to M&B the tracks, rails, ties, ballast, other track materials, switches, crossings, bridges, culverts, crossing warning devices and any and all improvements or fixtures affixed to the Eastern Line (Assets); (2) leased to M&B for a 20-year term the real property underlying the Eastern Line; and (3) granted M&B incidental overhead trackage rights over approximately 14 miles of CSXT trackage between the eastern end of the Eastern Line at Burkville and Montgomery, Ala., to effectuate interchange between M&B and CSXT at CSXT’s S and N Yard and Chester Yard at Montgomery. (*Id.*) The 2003 Agreement will expire at the end of its 20-year term, on November 14, 2023, thereby ending MNBR’s leasehold interest. (*Id.*) The 2003 Agreement provides that CSXT may reacquire the Assets from MNBR upon expiration of MNBR’s leasehold interest. (*Id.*) The parties have entered an agreement for CSXT to reacquire the Assets from MNBR (Transaction Agreement).⁴ (*Id.* at 2–3.) Because MNBR’s lease is set to expire during this proceeding, CSXT and MNBR have agreed to extend the 2003 Agreement until the first to occur of: (1) the closing date of the transactions contemplated under the Transaction Agreement; or (2) the “Drop Dead Date,” as defined in the Transaction Agreement. (*Id.*)

In Docket No. AB 1335X, MNBR filed a verified notice of exemption under the

¹ The Board notes that, for the Burkville–Western Junction segment, the difference between the milepost numbers is 33 but the claimed distance of the segment is 30.22 miles. CSXT is directed to confirm that 30.22 miles is the correct distance of this segment or to provide a correction. CSXT shall submit this information by November 21, 2023 when it submits the supplemental information discussed below.

² AGR and MNBR are both controlled by Genesee & Wyoming Inc. (GWI). *See Genesee & Wyo. Inc.—Control—RailAmerica, Inc.*, FD 35654, slip op. at 3 n.7 (STB served Dec. 20, 2012).

³ GWI acquired control of M&B in 2005 and later changed its name to MNBR. *See Genesee & Wyo. Inc.—Control Exemption—Rail Partners, L.P.*, FD 34708 (STB served June 24, 2005).

⁴ The Transaction Agreement is attached to the Application as Exhibit 2.