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Evaluating State Negligence in Preventing Human Trafficking Syndicates Targeting Women and Children to Ensure The Effective Implementation of Victim Recovery

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Abstract. *The crime of human trafficking, which disproportionately targets vulnerable groups, particularly women and children, is no longer merely an ordinary transnational crime. Rather, it has evolved into one of the gravest human rights violations of the modern era. Amid the increasing sophistication and organization of trafficking networks, the role of the state has come under serious scrutiny. Both constitutional principles and international legal instruments unequivocally mandate that the state bears the primary responsibility to prevent exploitation and to ensure the recovery of victims. Nevertheless, empirical evidence demonstrates the existence of state omission, whereby systemic failures in border surveillance, weak early detection mechanisms at the grassroots level, and tolerance of collusive practices in the issuance of identity documents have effectively created opportunities for criminal syndicates to operate with impunity. This article specifically examines the dimensions of state negligence and correlates them with the systemic failure to implement recovery rights for women and children who have survived human trafficking. This research employs a normative legal (juridical-normative) research method, utilizing conceptual and statutory approaches to identify structural weaknesses within Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Criminal Act of Human Trafficking. The findings reveal that failures in upstream prevention directly burden downstream victim recovery efforts. The enforcement of victims' recovery rights particularly the right to restitution financial compensation paid by offenders has proven largely ineffective. This is primarily attributable to regulatory weaknesses that allow perpetrators to substitute restitution payments with relatively short subsidiary imprisonment. Furthermore, the limited capacity of law enforcement agencies to conduct asset tracing during the early stages of criminal investigations leaves offenders' assets beyond the reach of the justice system. Consequently, victims whose lives have been irreparably damaged often receive no financial compensation,*



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thereby increasing the risk of secondary victimization and repeated exploitation to address this legal deadlock, this study proposes a reconstruction of state responsibility grounded in the principle of comprehensive restorative justice.

Keywords: *Children; Human Trafficking; Victim Recovery; Women.*

1. Introduction

Human rights are inherent rights possessed by every individual from birth, requiring absolute respect, protection, and fulfillment by the state. The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia establishes a robust philosophical and legal foundation through Article 28G, which guarantees every person's right to be free from torture and degrading treatment. Within Indonesia's constitutional framework, the state must not merely function as a passive "night-watchman state"; rather, it must actively and effectively safeguard the rights of its citizens throughout every stage of their lives. Such state intervention constitutes a constitutional imperative, particularly in protecting society's most vulnerable groups, namely women and children.¹

Despite the promises embodied in constitutional guarantees, the realities of globalization have been accompanied by the resurgence of modern slavery manifested through the crime of human trafficking. Human trafficking constitutes an extraordinary crime that fundamentally violates human dignity by reducing individuals to commodities for economic exploitation. This crime deprives victims not only of their physical liberty but also of their labor, financial independence, and bodily autonomy through deception, manipulation, coercion, and brutal violence. The magnitude of this crime is exacerbated by highly organized criminal syndicates possessing substantial financial resources, transnational networks, and the capacity to adapt rapidly to legal loopholes.

Within this systematic criminal landscape, women and children have consistently become the primary targets of trafficking syndicates. Their vulnerability is not accidental but rather the product of structural factors such as poverty, limited educational opportunities, and patriarchal social norms that marginalize women. Trafficking recruiters exploit economic desperation by offering fraudulent promises of high-paying employment, fictitious educational scholarships, or debt bondage arrangements. Once women and children become trapped within these

¹ Asshiddiqie, Jimly. *Konstitusi dan Konstitusionalisme Indonesia*. Jakarta: Konstitusi Press, 2006



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deceptive schemes, they are isolated and deprived of control over their own bodies and futures.

The modus operandi employed by trafficking syndicates has evolved beyond the anticipatory capabilities of conventional law enforcement agencies. Whereas recruitment previously relied on direct, face-to-face approaches, human trafficking has increasingly migrated into the digital sphere through cyber trafficking. Victims are recruited via fraudulent job advertisements on social media platforms, instant messaging applications, and romance scams conducted through online dating applications. Syndicates also demonstrate considerable expertise in forging official identity documents, including national identity cards and passports, enabling the unlawful movement of victims across provincial and international borders. The sophistication and rapid evolution of these criminal methods demand an equally adaptive and proactive response from the state.

However, rather than demonstrating institutional resilience, empirical evidence frequently reveals serious indications of state omission in preventing human trafficking. Such negligence is reflected in inadequate border surveillance, particularly along unofficial entry points; insufficient public education and anti-trafficking awareness programs facilitated by local governments; and the involvement of corrupt bureaucratic officials who facilitate the issuance of fraudulent identity documents for prospective victims. When the state fails to detect and prevent illegal departures at the initial stage, it effectively creates opportunities for trafficking syndicates to continue exploiting its citizens. Such negligence constitutes a betrayal of the constitutional obligation to protect fundamental rights.

The consequences of trafficking are profoundly destructive and often permanently alter victims' lives. Physically, women and children who become victims are vulnerable to life-threatening diseases, permanent disabilities resulting from abuse by employers or traffickers, and severe malnutrition. Psychologically, they endure profound trauma, depression, and diminished self-worth, frequently suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These multidimensional harms demonstrate that victims' suffering does not end upon rescue by law enforcement authorities. Instead, the invisible psychological wounds persist and require comprehensive, long-term recovery measures supported by the state.²

International law, particularly the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol),

² Harkrisnowo, Harkristuti. *Tindak Pidana Perdagangan Orang: Panduan Bagi Penegak Hukum*. Jakarta: Kemitraan (Partnership for Governance Reform), 2008.



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underscores the doctrine of State Responsibility, which obligates states to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of trafficking victims. Within this framework, the state's obligations cannot be considered fulfilled merely by repatriating victims or imprisoning low-level offenders. Genuine human rights justice requires comprehensive state intervention to ensure the effective implementation of victim recovery through medical rehabilitation, psychological counseling, and the restoration of financial rights unlawfully taken from victims.

Unfortunately, significant weaknesses remain within Indonesia's criminal justice system concerning the enforcement of victim recovery, particularly the right to restitution, namely financial compensation paid by offenders to victims. The Law on the Eradication of Human Trafficking permits offenders to substitute restitution payments with subsidiary imprisonment, which often amounts to only a few additional months of incarceration. This regulatory loophole has become a preferred escape mechanism for trafficking syndicates. Offenders frequently launder the proceeds of their crimes, claim financial incapacity before the courts, and opt instead for relatively brief terms of subsidiary imprisonment. Ironically, the legal system permits this strategy, leaving victims without the financial resources necessary to rebuild their lives.

The failure to implement effective victim recovery generates a recurring cycle of suffering commonly referred to as re-trafficking. Women and children who return to their communities while suffering severe psychological trauma and financial deprivation are once again confronted with the same economic hardships that initially rendered them vulnerable to exploitation. This absence of meaningful economic recovery leaves them highly susceptible to renewed recruitment by trafficking agents. Consequently, the state's failure to guarantee effective economic rehabilitation systematically exposes victims to repeated cycles of exploitation.

Considering the complexity of this humanitarian crisis, evaluating state negligence and the urgency of guaranteeing victim recovery has become an essential academic discourse. This article aims to critically assess the state's weaknesses in preventing organized human trafficking, identify the legal barriers hindering the implementation of victims' recovery rights, and formulate a reconstructed framework of state responsibility that prioritizes the interests of victims. Through a human rights and legal analysis, this research seeks to provide constructive recommendations for policymakers to ensure that Indonesia's justice system not only possesses strong legal norms but also effectively restores the dignity, lives, and futures of women and children who have survived human trafficking.



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2. Research Methods

This study adopts a normative legal (juridical-normative) research method, which examines law through the analysis of legal norms, principles, doctrines, and the harmonization of statutory regulations contained in legal literature and documentary sources.³ The research applies both the Conceptual Approach and the Statutory Approach.

The primary legal materials analyzed include the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights, Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Criminal Act of Human Trafficking, and Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection.

The collected legal materials are analyzed using a qualitative deductive approach to examine the relationship between structural state negligence in the prevention of human trafficking and the failure to effectively implement victim recovery within Indonesia's criminal justice system. The ultimate objective is to formulate an applicable legal framework capable of strengthening state accountability and ensuring comprehensive protection and recovery for victims of human trafficking.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Dimensions of State Negligence in Preventing Human Trafficking Syndicates

The conceptualization of state negligence (state omission) within the framework of Human Rights law refers to the failure or absence of adequate action by government authorities in fulfilling their protective obligation (duty to protect). Such negligence does not mean that the state intentionally plans criminal acts; rather, it reflects the state's indifference, lack of responsiveness, or tolerance of structural conditions that facilitate the operation of criminal syndicates. In the context of preventing the Crime of Trafficking in Persons (TPPO), the state's responsibility is measured by the effectiveness of upstream prevention programs, including territorial surveillance, the eradication of bureaucratic mafias, and the protection of vulnerable communities. Facts on the ground indicate that the foundation of this prevention system remains plagued by severe structural deficiencies.

The first and most apparent point of negligence lies in the weakness of supervision at border areas and unofficial ports (illegal crossing routes). As an archipelagic country, Indonesia has a vast geographical expanse, which is often

³ Marzuki, Peter Mahmud. *Penelitian Hukum*. Jakarta: Kencana Prenada Media Group, 2005.

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cited as the reason for the state's inability to control the cross-border movement of its citizens. However, the lack of maritime patrols, the absence of biometric detection devices at peripheral checkpoints, and the insufficient number of immigration officers equipped with a victim-protection perspective have created wide opportunities for illegal labor trafficking networks to smuggle women and children abroad. This weakness in security infrastructure clearly demonstrates that the state has not prioritized the prevention of human trafficking as a high-level national security issue.⁴

The second form of negligence is closely linked to the endemic practices of corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN) within lower-level government bureaucracy. Human trafficking syndicates would not be able to obtain passports, falsify children's ages to appear as adults on identity cards, or produce fake training certificates without the involvement or acquiescence of authorized officials. Illegal levies within civil registration offices and immigration agencies prove that the state's civil registration system has been infiltrated by mafia interests. The state's failure to firmly discipline and cleanse its bureaucracy of corrupt officials constitutes a form of institutional negligence that is extremely harmful to vulnerable groups.

Third, the weakness of legal literacy programs and the absence of an early warning system at the grassroots or village level. Villages are the primary recruitment grounds for prospective trafficking victims. However, interventions by both central and regional governments in providing anti-trafficking education are often merely ceremonial and fail to reach the communities most affected by poverty. The absence of Village Regulations (Perdes) requiring strict registration for residents intending to migrate through private recruitment agencies, combined with the lack of empowerment of community leaders as prevention agents, allows women and children to be easily deceived by the promises of prosperity skillfully packaged by recruiters operating within their own villages.

Fourth, negligence in responding to the evolution of crime into cyberspace. Along with digitalization, trafficking syndicates now use social media and digital platforms to lure victims. Unfortunately, the cyber intelligence capacity and cyber patrol capabilities of Indonesian law enforcement remain several steps behind those of the perpetrators. The process of taking down fake accounts advertising fraudulent job opportunities proceeds slowly due to complicated cross-sector bureaucratic regulations. The state's failure to establish a robust

⁴ Wahyudi, Iwan. "Dinamika Kejahatan Transnasional: Analisis Kriminologis terhadap Tindak Pidana Perdagangan Orang di Asia Tenggara," *Jurnal HAM dan Keadilan Global*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2021, hlm. 112-130.



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digital defense system leaves children and young women active online as easy targets for predators without adequate protection.

Fifth, inequality and the limited allocation of budgets for trafficking prevention at the Regional Government level. Although the Anti-Trafficking Law mandates the establishment of Task Forces for the Prevention and Handling of Human Trafficking from the national to district levels, these task forces often exist only in name (paper tigers). Regional leaders frequently fail to prioritize this humanitarian crime within Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budgets (APBD), citing budget constraints. Consequently, prevention programs, safe house operations, and prevention patrols at the subdistrict level become completely ineffective, reflecting the absence of genuine political will among policymakers.

Sixth, a law enforcement paradigm that is reactive akin to "firefighting" rather than proactive. Police authorities often launch large-scale investigations only after cases become high-profile or go viral on social media, or after receiving complaints from civil society organizations (NGOs) that have identified victims. It is extremely rare to find proactive law enforcement initiatives that dismantle trafficking syndicates during the recruitment stage. This victim-dependent approach is highly dangerous because once the law begins operating only at the downstream stage, the physical and psychological harm suffered by exploited women and children can never truly be undone.

Seventh, the lack of a community-based protection approach. The state often monopolizes security affairs without empowering the potential strength of local communities. In fact, women's organizations (PKK), integrated health service (posyandu) volunteers, and youth organizations (karang taruna) could be trained to recognize the characteristics of illegal recruiters entering their villages. By failing to invest in community-based social safety networks, the state further deepens structural negligence, leaving victims isolated and unaware of where or to whom they should report before being transported by trafficking syndicates outside their regions.

Eighth, as a synthesis of Part A, state negligence during the prevention phase is the root cause of every trafficking-related tragedy. The failure to establish a corruption-resistant monitoring system, the absence of legal literacy in villages, and the sluggish response to digital threats create a chain of causation in which ordinary citizens are left to struggle alone against criminal mafias generating billions of rupiah in profits. Therefore, once the state has failed to prevent individuals from becoming victims, the moral and legal responsibility to ensure those victims achieve full recovery must become the state's absolute obligation,



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one that cannot be compromised during judicial proceedings at the downstream stage.

3.2. Juridical and Structural Obstacles in the Execution of Victim Recovery

The victim recovery phase constitutes the heart of Human Rights enforcement in exploitative crimes. The right to recover psychologically, medically, and economically through restitution is not an act of charity or compassion but rather a fundamental right that has been taken from victims and must be restored. The Constitution and the Anti-Trafficking Law guarantee that every victim of human trafficking has the right to seek financial compensation for suffering, lost income, and medical expenses resulting from the crimes committed against them. However, the ideals embodied in these legal provisions often collapse when confronted with the reality of legal enforcement, which is filled with practical dead ends.⁵

The most monumental legal obstacle that undermines the principle of justice is the legal loophole contained in Article 50 paragraph (4) of the Anti-Trafficking Law itself. This provision states that if an offender is unable to pay the restitution ordered by the court, the obligation may be substituted with a relatively short term of subsidiary imprisonment. This loophole has been systematically exploited by trafficking syndicate defendants. They deliberately launder their assets, pretend to be impoverished before the court, and willingly choose to serve a brief additional prison sentence while leaving victims burdened with debts amounting to tens of millions of rupiah. This regulation constitutes a fatal defect that nullifies the philosophy of restorative justice.

The second crucial obstacle stems from the limited capacity of police investigators and prosecutors to conduct asset tracing from the outset of investigations. Investigators in Indonesia often remain trapped in a paradigm focused on obtaining confessions and proving the criminal elements of exploitation or recruitment while making minimal use of follow-the-money investigative techniques. As a result, bank accounts, property assets, and cash belonging to the principal perpetrators are often neither frozen nor confiscated during the pretrial stage. Consequently, when restitution is ordered by the court, no remaining assets are available for execution or auction to compensate victims.

Third, overlapping authority and institutional ego among law enforcement agencies further complicate the bureaucracy of victim recovery. Ideally, the

⁵ Arief, Barda Nawawi. *Bunga Rampai Kebijakan Hukum Pidana (Perkembangan Penyusunan Konsep KUHP Baru)*. Jakarta: Kencana, 2011.



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execution of restitution requires perfect coordination among the Police, the Prosecutor's Office, the Courts, and the Witness and Victim Protection Agency (LPSK). In practice, however, LPSK which has the authority to calculate victims' losses is often involved too late by investigators. Even when LPSK has objectively determined the amount of losses, public prosecutors sometimes lack the persuasive arguments needed to convince judges, or judges themselves arbitrarily reduce restitution amounts without adequate psychological assessments.

Fourth, the lack of funding and state infrastructure to provide temporary rehabilitation services before court decisions become final. During the months spent undergoing judicial proceedings, women and child victims are required to stay in shelters and are unable to work. Frequently, the budgets allocated by regional Social Affairs Offices are severely limited, resulting in inadequate trauma counseling or even insufficient nutritional support. The lengthy criminal justice process, combined with the absence of interim financial assistance mechanisms for victims (temporary compensation), causes many survivors to suffer depression and often withdraw their testimony simply to return home and earn a living.

Fifth, the perspective of some judicial panels remains highly conservative and focused exclusively on retributive justice. In deciding trafficking cases, judges are not infrequently of the opinion that imposing the maximum prison sentence on offenders already represents the highest form of justice, while considering compensation (restitution) merely an ancillary civil matter of lesser importance. The absence of a victim-centered approach and gender sensitivity among judges often results in court decisions that neglect to impose precautionary asset seizures on perpetrators' property, ultimately depriving women and children of economic justice.

Sixth, procedural difficulties relating to proving material losses before the court. Women and child victims of trafficking are often confined, deprived of their identity cards, and never sign formal employment contracts that could serve as evidence of their wages. When LPSK submits restitution claims for victims' lost income over several years, defense lawyers for trafficking syndicates frequently challenge them on the grounds that no written documentation exists. Judges adhering to rigid legal positivism often reject these restitution claims due to insufficient evidence. Such victim-unfriendly evidentiary requirements clearly disadvantage individuals who have been oppressed and deprived of the ability to maintain administrative documentation.



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Seventh, the discontinuity of sustainable social reintegration programs following court judgments. Indonesia's judicial system generally considers a case concluded once the verdict is delivered and the offender is imprisoned. There is no legally binding obligation requiring local governments to ensure that victims returning to their villages receive access to business capital, vocational training, or school reintegration for child victims. This lack of post-judgment monitoring leaves survivors to face layered trauma alone amid social ridicule from villagers who often stigmatize them as "immoral women" or "deportees."

Eighth, as the cumulative consequence of these juridical weaknesses, the greatest danger is re-trafficking. When women and children return to their communities in poverty, burdened by debts owed to their original recruiters, and receive not a single rupiah of restitution despite court judgments, they have no rational means of survival. In desperation, they are forced to accept new offers from other trafficking networks, perpetuating the cycle of modern slavery. This is the most ironic consequence of failed recovery execution: the law itself silently becomes a facilitator of survivors' ruined futures.

3.3. Reconstructing State Responsibility to Guarantee Just Recovery

To dismantle the systemic deadlock that harms victims, the state must undertake revolutionary measures through regulatory reconstruction that shifts the orientation of law enforcement from purely punitive retributive justice toward comprehensive restorative justice. The first fundamental reform that must be realized immediately is an amendment to the Anti-Trafficking Law, particularly by eliminating the provision that allows subsidiary imprisonment as a substitute for restitution obligations. The law must clearly establish that restitution imposed upon traffickers, corporations, or intellectual masterminds is absolute and mandatory (imperative). Offenders should not be given the option of purchasing victims' suffering with only a few additional months of imprisonment.

The second and most revolutionary reconstruction measure is the creation of a Victim Trust Fund. Recognizing that direct asset recovery from trafficking syndicates is often difficult or that perpetrators may genuinely be insolvent, the state must not allow victims to return home empty-handed. The state should establish a compensation fund financed through the State Budget (APBN), allocations from traffic fine revenues, or proceeds from confiscated assets of corruption and narcotics syndicates. Whenever a court orders restitution but the



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offender fails to pay, the Victim Trust Fund should immediately disburse compensation to victims in order to safeguard their livelihoods.⁶

Third, the transformation of investigative approaches through strengthening technology-based financial intelligence capacity. Reconstructing state responsibility requires that investigators from the National Police and the Prosecutor's Office no longer investigate trafficking cases using conventional methods. Instead, investigations must simultaneously target predicate offenses and Money Laundering Crimes (TPPU). Collaboration with the Indonesian Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK) should become mandatory from the first day an investigation order is issued. Freezing syndicates' financial flows before they can transfer their assets elsewhere is the only guarantee that sufficient property will remain available for confiscation and future restitution.

Fourth, institutional governance reform through the establishment of integrated Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs) at every provincial and district police office. Regulations should require that whenever police rescue trafficking victims or arrest suspects, they must immediately involve social workers, clinical psychologists, and representatives from LPSK. These teams should conduct initial assessments to separate women and children from intimidating police interrogations. Such early coordination ensures that victims' trauma is appropriately managed while material and immaterial losses are calculated before case files are transferred to prosecutors.

Fifth, optimizing corporate criminal liability in trafficking offenses. Many exploitative practices operate under the legal guise of officially licensed Indonesian Migrant Worker Placement Companies (P3MI) acting fraudulently. Victim recovery can be much better guaranteed if law enforcement targets corporate entities because companies possess identifiable assets, buildings, and bank accounts. Revoking business licenses and confiscating all corporate assets of companies proven to have falsified documents or exploited female migrant workers constitute effective measures for dismantling the logistical foundations of trafficking networks.

Sixth, mainstreaming Human Rights perspectives and gender sensitivity throughout the judiciary, particularly among judges. The Supreme Court should issue a Supreme Court Regulation (PERMA) providing rigid technical guidance for judges handling cases involving the exploitation of women and children. Judges should be trained not to reject restitution claims merely because victims

⁶ Siregar, Bismar. "Efektivitas Restitusi bagi Korban Perdagangan Manusia: Sebuah Tinjauan Yuridis Normatif," *Jurnal Hukum Pidana Nasional*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2022, hlm. 45-60.



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confined by traffickers lack written receipts. They should also be granted discretionary authority to apply victim-oriented standards of proof and confidently order precautionary seizures of offenders' property even where investigators failed to do so during the pre-prosecution stage.

Seventh, strengthening sustainable social reintegration systems as a manifestation of post-trial state responsibility. Recovery does not end in the courtroom. The Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Villages should issue regulations requiring Regional Governments to earmark a percentage of Regional Budgets (APBD) or Village Funds specifically for the economic empowerment of former trafficking victims. Such programs should include startup business capital, entrepreneurship mentoring, full educational scholarships for child victims, and guaranteed long-term mental health services without imposing financial burdens upon victims' families.

Eighth, as a synthesis of these reconstruction proposals, the state must recognize that prevention and recovery are inseparable components of justice. Replacing past negligence through the establishment of a Victim Trust Fund, aggressive asset confiscation policies, and comprehensive reform of law enforcement practices represents the highest form of constitutional moral responsibility. Creating a framework of just recovery is not merely a matter of complying with statutory provisions but of demonstrating that the Indonesian state still possesses the conscience necessary to restore the sovereignty, dignity, and self-worth of its women and children from the depths of modern slavery.

4. Conclusion

The state's negligence in establishing a robust early detection system and effective border protection has produced an unspeakable humanitarian tragedy for Indonesian women and children trapped by human trafficking syndicates. These structural weaknesses in prevention should be fully compensated by the state through guaranteeing victims' rights to recovery and the effective execution of restitution within the judicial process. Unfortunately, the current criminal justice system continues to inherit regulatory defects that permit offenders to substitute restitution obligations with light subsidiary imprisonment, compounded by weak asset tracing, ultimately resulting in secondary victimization and returning survivors to cycles of re-trafficking driven by continuing poverty. To break this cycle of impunity and injustice, reconstructing the paradigm of state responsibility from retributive justice toward comprehensive restorative justice has become a historical necessity. Eliminating the legal loophole allowing substitute imprisonment for restitution, impoverishing trafficking syndicates through money laundering-based asset



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confiscation, and realizing the establishment of a Victim Trust Fund financed by the state are urgent legal priorities. Protecting, restoring, and safeguarding the future of women and child victims of human trafficking is not an additional duty of the state but rather the manifestation of the Constitution's solemn promise that no citizen shall have their human dignity stripped away without the state being present to rescue them.

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