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Concerns raised over State Dept.'s ability to police staff over human trafficking



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Story highlights

- The State Department lacks an ability to police its own staff in matters of human trafficking despite its strong condemnation of the practice, Sen. Chuck Grassley said
- Grassley cited allegations from whistleblowers and a report from the State Department's own Office of Inspector General this month

Washington (CNN) The State Department lacks an ability to police its own staff in matters of human trafficking despite its strong condemnation of the practice, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee said Friday.

In a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry, Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, cited allegations from whistleblowers, and a report from the State Department's own Office of Inspector General this month that said the department is not in a position to completely hold its own employees accountable for human trafficking violations, or to ensure policies are understood and followed.

Grassley also cited court records that indicated a U.S. diplomat stationed in Japan in 2008 was able to maintain her employment with the State following reports from her housekeeper that the diplomat and her husband kidnapped and repeatedly raped her.

That case, along with the inspector general's report, "raises questions about the Department's commitment to holding itself to the same standard by which it judges other countries in assessing their compliance with anti-trafficking standards," Grassley wrote to Kerry.

In his letter, Grassley said his questions "merit heightened scrutiny," given a 2014 OIG report that found the State Department's own investigation of human trafficking-related allegations during the tenure of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton "suffered from an appearance of undue influence and favoritism by Department managers and leaders, and a failure to timely report."

The State Department did not respond to a CNN request for comment.

Each year, the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons releases the annual Trafficking in Persons report which aims to shine a light on instances of human trafficking around the world and look for ways to end the practice.

"We want to provide a strong incentive for governments at every level to do all that they can to prosecute trafficking and to shield at-risk populations," Kerry said in July just after this year's report was released.

In its report this month, the OIG said two of the three recommendations it made to the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons in 2011, intended to increase awareness among State Department employees about human trafficking, have not been fully implemented.

In a letter to OIG earlier this month, Sarah Sewall, under secretary for civilian security, democracy and human rights, said the State Department intended to execute a plan of action to fulfill those remaining recommendations.