

22 July 2019

MEDIA RELEASE

Protection of refugees and migrants at risk should be elevated as a priority issue in the region

Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration concludes eighth meeting, held in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Policy-makers and experts from nine countries in the region returned to Jakarta on 28-29 June 2019 for the eighth meeting of the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM). After constructive discussions over the two days about the pressing forced migration issues facing the region, ADFM Co-Convenors call on the region to elevate the protection of refugees and migrants at risk, and coordinated responses to mass displacement situations, as a priority issue for nation states and regional forums, ahead of the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019.

ADFM members had a frank and constructive discussion on the mass displacement in Cox's Bazar and Rakhine State. "Two years in, this displacement already affects the whole region. There are now clear opportunities for regional bodies like ASEAN and the Bali Process to assist Myanmar and Bangladesh to continue to work towards the voluntary, sustainable repatriation, in safety and dignity, of the Rohingya to their homes in Rakhine State. This assistance needs to be coordinated and within the framework of the existing agreements between Bangladesh and Myanmar, and using all of the regional resources available," said Co-Convenor Tri Nuke Pudjiastuti, from the Indonesian Institute of Sciences.

There is a strong desire in the region to meet the aspirations and objectives of the Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration and use them as a framework for addressing the protection challenges facing refugees and migrants at risk.

The ADFM Secretariat was pleased to advance concrete plans to hold a roundtable on sharing regional practice on alternatives to child detention in Thailand in November 2019. The roundtable will focus on developing a regional platform and program of learning and action among interested countries and organisations. "Thailand has shown it is eager to be a leader on this issue in our region, and we are pleased to be able to work with the Thai Government on advancing this proposal" said Co-Convenor Sriprapha Petchamesree, from the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University. The roundtable will be jointly arranged by the ADFM and International Detention Coalition.

Another key focus of the meeting was once again the role of ASEAN and the Bali Process in responding to protection challenges for refugees and migrants at risk. "Part of the appeal in meeting in Jakarta was that it allowed us to strengthen our connections with ASEAN sectoral bodies such as AICHR and ACWC, who each have an important mandate related to refugees and migrants" said Co-Convenor Dato' Steve Wong, from the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Malaysia. "We are looking forward to working more closely with ASEAN bodies to advance coordinated responses to forced migration challenges in the region." The ADFM held a reception with Permanent Representatives and other ASEAN officials on 27 June 2019, which was generously co-hosted by the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Finally, with six months until the Global Refugee Forum is held in Geneva in December, it is imperative the region make the most of this spotlight on forced migration issues. "An event to catalyse more support for the displaced populations in Bangladesh and Myanmar, particularly the Rohingya, would be an important step forward. Furthermore, there are also a number of steps that could be taken to better coordinate counter-trafficking and prevention efforts, in line with the recommendations of the ADFM's recent trafficking risk assessment of the situation in Cox's Bazar," said Co-Convenor Travers McLeod, CEO of the Centre for Policy Development.

The ADFM will be represented at the Bali Process Ad Hoc Senior Officials' Meeting in Danang this week and will brief officials on the ideas advanced at its eighth meeting. It is expected that the ADFM will next meet around March 2020 and will continue to advance effective, durable and dignified responses to refugees and migrants at risk in the region.

The agenda and participant list of the eighth ADFM meeting are available on the CPD website (www.cpd.org.au). For further information, please contact CPD's Annabel Brown on +61 417 997 360 or via annabel.brown@cpd.org.au.