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MEDIA RELEASE

Urgent action needed on escalating forced migration crises

Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration Co-Convenors warn of critical challenges and call for urgent action

The Co-Convenors of the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) are gravely concerned about the forced migration risks facing the Indo Pacific region and the lack of preparedness to deal with them.

“There is no time to waste”, said ADFM Co-Convenor Travers McLeod, CEO of the Centre for Policy Development, following the 10th ADFM meeting held virtually last month. “COVID-19 makes it even more important that countries across the region are better prepared to respond to sudden displacement and vulnerable populations already displaced are better protected. If critical challenges are not addressed we fear more innocent lives and livelihoods will be lost.”

The 10th ADFM meeting, held virtually last month, brought together current ambassadors, former foreign ministers, officials from governments, UN agencies and civil society leaders from nine countries. The ADFM is a Track II dialogue where all participants attend in a personal capacity. It last convened in person in Dhaka following a visit to Cox’s Bazar in February 2020. The virtual May meeting was held amid a rapidly deteriorating forced migration situation in the Indo Pacific. A discussion paper identifying critical forced migration challenges was prepared for the meeting and is being made public by the ADFM Co-Convenors today.

“We have identified five strategic challenges that make sudden large-scale displacement events an acute risk, with associated risks of human trafficking, migrant smuggling and related exploitation,” said ADFM Co-Convenor Herizal Hazri, CEO of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia. “Events in Myanmar, the continued stalemate around repatriation of the Rohingya in Bangladesh, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and ongoing threats to peace and stability in countries like Syria and Afghanistan combine to increase the likelihood of both new sudden displacement events, and ongoing displacement becoming protracted.”

“Dynamics common to each of these challenges are making it more difficult for countries across the region to respond effectively. There is a leadership deficit, an absence of accountability and responsibility, tension between national and regional interests, and an underutilisation of early warning systems and networks which already exist.”

“Although the situation is bleak, there are practical things that can be done now and it was pleasing to see among ADFM participants a genuine desire to move beyond business as usual and respond creatively and proactively.” said ADFM Co- Convenor Tri Nuke Pudjastuti, of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI). “The region would benefit from champions on particular issues, new coalitions to support humanitarian responses, and existing institutions making a greater effort to fulfill their potential.”

“Several regional institutions have existing mandates to deal with issues of forced migration, but they are not making the most of these capabilities. The Bali Process Consultation Mechanism and Task Force on Planning & Preparedness are entities whose promise remains largely unrealised. The upcoming twentieth anniversary of the Bali Process and associated events is an opportunity for reviewing and rejuvenating this institution, in line with future strategic priorities.”

“ASEAN action is necessary but will be insufficient”, said ADFM Co-Convenor Sriprapha Petcharamesree, from the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University, Thailand. “The appointment of the Special Envoy to Myanmar can make a big difference, especially if the Envoy’s mandate includes addressing the Rohingya displacement and fosters collaboration within ASEAN (such as between the AHA Centre and AICHR) and with other institutions (such as the Bali Process, SAARC and BIMSTEC).”

“At no time in the six years since the ADFM was established have we seen developments as dire as those currently facing our region. That these circumstances are being faced during a global pandemic only amplifies both the challenge and the urgency.” ADFM Co-Convenors will now conduct further strategic research and advocacy on specific proposals raised at the meeting, working as appropriate with ADM participants, governments and institutions across the region.

The discussion paper, agenda and participant list of the tenth ADFM meeting are available on the CPD website (www.cpd.org.au). For further information please contact adf@cpd.org.au.