

12th ADFM Meeting: Summary of next steps Jakarta, 16-17 May 2023

The Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) convened its twelfth meeting in Jakarta on 16-17 May: the first to be held in person in more than three years. So much has changed since our last in person meeting in Dhaka, Bangladesh in February 2020 but we were pleased that the enthusiasm in the room to find durable humane solutions remained the same.

The 12th ADFM meeting considered three themes: ASEAN's role in the management of forced migration; strengthening the region's response to the Rohingya displacement and ongoing boat movements; and policy and practice to improve the mental health of refugees. The meeting took place days after Cyclone Mocha made landfall in Rakhine State, and the importance of acting quickly and protecting vulnerable groups was front and centre of discussions.

The meeting comprised around 30 participants from eight countries, including two civil society representatives from Myanmar. We elected to meet in Jakarta in order to capitalise on the momentum of Indonesia as the 2023 ASEAN Chair, under the slogan *ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth*, and we extend our thanks to the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for hosting the ADFM Dinner on 16 May. Participants attend the ADFM in their personal capacity and speak under the Chatham House Rule. A brief summary of the key takeaways from each session follows below.

Role of ASEAN

During the session on ASEAN's role in the management of forced migration, participants discussed in small groups a number of real life cross-border challenges, and considered how they could be addressed differently if ASEAN had a formal body tasked with addressing forced migration. Views in the room were divided on whether a new body would be the most useful avenue to pursue, or whether it is instead better to expand existing ASEAN frameworks and institutions. Given the scale and impact of forced migration in Southeast Asia, it makes sense for ASEAN to consider its options carefully. Khun Kasit Piromya, Former Foreign Minister of Thailand, also shared his reflections on the role of ASEAN during the ADFM Dinner, reflecting on the importance of Indonesian leadership and the strength of past collaborations between Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand.

Based on the two days of discussions, participants agreed that it would be useful for the ADFM Secretariat to conduct a stocktake of existing ASEAN mechanisms in order to identify protection gaps, to assess how a declaration on forced migration could be beneficial. If indeed it is decided it would be beneficial, the stocktake could then suggest how best to move forward. This could potentially be done through including forced migration into Post-2025 ASEAN Vision being developed by the High Level Task Force, and putting forced migration issues on the agenda of meetings with dialogue partners.

Regional Responses to the Rohingya Displacement

The ADFM has worked on the Rohingya displacement for many years, including conducting a trafficking risk assessment in Cox's Bazar in 2018, and holding our ninth meeting in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in order to progress solutions in 2020. At our 12th meeting we discussed the potential role of ASEAN, Bali Process in addressing the crisis, as well as a potential third way of developing a 'Regional Rohingya Support Platform' ahead of the second Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in December 2023, which could complement existing joint pledges on the Rohingya crisis.

The role of the Bali Process Consultation Mechanism was also discussed, including ways of using the mechanism more intentionally to address root causes and have maximum impact. Related to this is the role of the Taskforce on Planning and Preparedness (TFPP), which the ADFM Secretariat has previously recommended take a more proactive role in forward planning.

Mental health of refugees and forced migrants

The third topic of the agenda, mental health of refugees and forced migrants, was a first for the ADFM. Forced migrants face significantly higher rates of emotional distress and trauma than general populations, however there is too often a gap in support available to these groups. Typically in ASEAN countries these communities receive support only on humanitarian grounds, thus more systemic policies and practices are needed. In particular, it was generally agreed that it was worth exploring establishing a regional Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Standing Partner Mechanism to address mental health needs of populations in crisis, as well as developing in-country MHPSS minimum service packages.

Participants in the ADFM meeting included experts in forced migration, human trafficking and refugee protection, rather than health or mental health experts. Thus the role of the ADFM in this conversation is most relevant to the discussion on identifying barriers to access for forced migrants and options to remove them, and conducting training with officials who come into contact with forced migrants.

Ultimately, as Khun Kasit noted in his remarks at the ADFM Dinner, mental health of refugees and forced migrants can best be addressed through tackling root causes of displacement, such as the ongoing conflict in Myanmar, poverty and lack of access to education and livelihoods.

Summary of recommendations from the meeting

- A. Conduct a stocktake of existing ASEAN mechanisms to assess how a declaration on forced migration could be beneficial, and how best to progress it. This may include building forced migration into Post-2025 ASEAN Vision, and putting it on the agenda of meetings with dialogue partners.
- B. Explore the possible creation of a Regional Rohingya Support Platform to address issues to improve the lives of Rohingya in the region, which could be announced as part of a joint pledge at the December 2023 Global Refugee Forum.
- C. Offer to provide advice to the Bali Process Co-Chairs on:
 - the effective use of the Consultation Mechanism, involving affected countries and including Rohingya groups as part of their consultation,
 - and actively using the Taskforce on Planning and Preparedness to strengthen understanding of search and rescue at sea.
- D. Promote establishing a regional MHPSS Standing Partner Mechanism to address mental health needs of populations in crisis, as well as developing in-country MHPSS minimum service packages.
- E. Explore removing barriers to accessing mental health services for forced migrants, and promote mental health awareness training for officials who come into contact with forced migrants.

As an immediate next step, the ADFM Secretariat will be taking forward the first three of these recommendations, and we look forward to working with you all to progress them. We are also looking ahead to our next in person ADFM meeting in 2024, which is likely to be in Malaysia.

About the ADFM

Established in 2015, the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) is an independent Track 1.5 forum for genuine dialogue on the critical forced migration issues facing the region. The ADFM has contributed to changes in governance, policy and practice benefiting refugees, stateless, and trafficked persons, in partnership with the region's institutions and national governments. The ADFM Secretariat is convened by CPD in Australia, in collaboration with partners there from the Indonesian National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia and the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies. We are very grateful for their ongoing partnership and support of this work, which could only be achieved through this unique collaboration.

For more information or to discuss any of the above further, please contact adfm@cpd.org.au.