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Asia-Pacific region can galvanise the globe on migrants, refugees after New York Summits

Progress in this region will strengthen 2018 Global Compacts, says ADFM.

Much of the focus at the New York Summits has been on Europe and the Middle East, but the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) argues this region can be a critical node for more effective, dignified and durable action on migrants and refugees.

The third ADFM meeting was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from 4-6 September. This followed meetings in Melbourne in August 2015 and Bangkok in January 2016. The ADFM's first set of recommendations were adopted in March by the Ministerial Conference of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime.

Travers McLeod, CEO of the Centre for Policy Development, one of the ADFM's conveners, said the Asia-Pacific region was poised to play a leading global role.

"The Summits have generated important new pledges, but their lasting contribution is to kick-start two years of negotiations for separate Global Compacts on Refugees and Migrants. Concerted progress in the Asia-Pacific region on trafficking, disaster preparedness and the new Bali Process consultation mechanism on mass displacement are a catalyst for greater global ambition."

"Our region could be on the cusp of a collective, regional approach if we sharpen the focus on preventing crises like that in the Andaman Sea in 2015 from happening again, and if all countries step up to the plate. This will only occur when domestic and regional approaches are in sync."

"Asia has seen large forced migration flows in the past but the last year has witnessed a respite", said Sriprapha Petcharamesree, from Mahidol University's Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies. "This presents policymakers with the space to deal more effectively with human trafficking, asylum seeker protection and refugee status determination, and improve regional cooperation."

Steven Wong, Deputy CEO of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia, which hosted the third ADFM meeting, reinforced this view.

"The Bali Process Review of responses to the Andaman Sea crisis is underway and will consider how national, regional and subregional contingency preparedness can be improved."

"The ADFM made important progress in Kuala Lumpur in the examination of national security concerns arising from forced migration flows and the need for better regional information cooperation and national identification and registration systems. It also considered how ASEAN can take a more constructive role in the interest of its member states and how the private sector could be strategically engaged. Our next meeting in Indonesia in March 2017 will focus on human trafficking networks."

"New York is where the global talks have been, but this region may be where the action is. Countries must shy away from short-term, unilateral responses on forced migration and prioritise building a system with staying power that allows countries and people to flourish."

Papers for the third meeting are now available on the CPD website. For interviews please contact Shivani Nadan on +61 (0) 409 010 818.