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## Bali Process urged to respond to humanitarian and security crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh

**Time to honour promise made after 2015 Andaman Sea crisis, says ADFM.**

Australia and Indonesia, the Co-Chairs of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, have been asked by regional experts to fulfil a promise made after the 2015 Andaman Sea crisis by responding quickly to the refugee crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

The Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM), an expert group recognised by the Bali Process for its independent policy advice, told senior officials following its meeting in Manila this week that the conditions for triggering the Consultation Mechanism established by ministers after the 2015 crisis have been met.

“The ADFM’s strong view is that the Bali Process Consultation Mechanism must be activated”, said Tri Nuke Pudjiastuti, of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, one of the four convening organisations of the ADFM.

“Retno Marsudi and Julie Bishop, Indonesian and Australian Foreign Ministers and Bali Process Co-Chairs, convinced fellow ministers to institute vital reforms in March 2016 so that the failure of the Bali Process to act during the 2015 Andaman Sea crisis would not happen again. Those reforms should now be put to work.”

“In addition to the Co-Chairs triggering the Consultation Mechanism, Indonesia should continue to encourage a single ASEAN position on the crisis. So too Australia with other Bali Process members.”

In March 2016, Bali Process ministers pledged more agile and timely responses to urgent irregular migration. They created a Consultation Mechanism for fast communication and coordination in emergency situations. Senior officials reviewed the 2015 Andaman Sea crisis and agreed to more reforms in November 2016.

“Activating the Consultation Mechanism could achieve several objectives”, said Steve Wong, of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia. “First and foremost, it would ensure there is an honest broker with authority and legitimacy to share information and coordinate policy responses in the region.”

“How this crisis unfolds from here is predictable”, said Sriprapha Petchamesree, from the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University, Thailand.

“Bali Process senior officials should explore responses to potential scenarios, including ongoing conflict in Rakhine State, further assistance required by Bangladesh authorities and international agencies, onward maritime movements, exploitation by people smuggling and human trafficking networks, Myanmar’s willingness to allow people to return, and resettlement options for those people permanently displaced.”

“It’s time for Australia and Indonesia to deliver on the promise they made as Co-Chairs of the Bali Process in March 2016”, said Travers McLeod, CEO of the Centre for Policy Development.

“Stepping up could make a huge difference to the region’s most vulnerable people and give other regional structures like ASEAN confidence to take appropriate action. Failure to act risks undermining the credibility of the Bali Process and would be inconsistent with important progress made over the past 18 months.”

“With more than 400,000 people estimated to have fled Myanmar for Bangladesh since violence broke out in Rakhine State on 25 August, this is an historic opportunity for the Bali Process to demonstrate its value and the benefits of cooperative problem solving in the region.”

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