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Bali Process countries signal preparedness for constructive action on forced migration.

Review of Andaman Sea Situation of May 2015 leads to vital reforms.

The Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration's (ADFM) conveners commend the decisions made by senior officials and representatives of member states and organisations of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, to step up operational coordination, leverage joined up regional expertise, and build partnerships with ASEAN. The ADFM's conveners believe these reforms will be critical improvements to the way the region responds to mass displacement of migrants.

Senior officials made these decisions at their meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 16 November, after considering the findings of a Review into the Region's Response to the Andaman Sea Situation of May 2015. The Review was authorised by Bali Process Ministers in March 2016 following a recommendation from the ADFM.

The Final Review Report from senior officials stated: "We recall that although there was knowledge of maritime movements, it was the media reporting to the world on the ships stranded at sea, the discovery of graves and more profoundly the lack of coordination and agreement in the region that prompted action. This should not happen again."

"The Andaman Sea situation of May 2015 was a human tragedy and significantly tested the capabilities of individual governments", said Arja Keski Nummi, a fellow of the Centre for Policy Development. "The Report acknowledges that, at the time, there was little functioning capability to deal with root causes of displacement in the affected countries and little functioning capability to deal with the consequences for the region when mass displacement occurs."

In Colombo, Bali Process countries and organisations agreed to form a Task Force on Planning and Preparedness, which will see a level of operational coordination that has not existed. This group will work to harmonise detection, search, rescue, disembarkation and shelter practices across countries. The ADFM has been invited to provide ongoing policy advice to the Bali Process, to plan for and improve responses in the future. Bali Process senior officials will also begin dialogue with institutions in ASEAN with the technical capacity to improve regional responses to large influxes of migrants.

"Bali Process members have made the institution more fit for the future. If implemented well, the recommendations will ensure Bali Process countries are better prepared when mass displacement occurs. We congratulate them for that", says Tri Nuke Pudjiastuti, of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences.

The ADFM's conveners are mindful much work remains to be done to address the challenges of forced migration. Steve Wong, of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia, observed that "the situation in Myanmar's Rakhine State, which triggered the Andaman Sea crisis in May 2015, has deteriorated over the past month and continues to be of grave concern to countries in the region."

"The ADFM offers its continued support to the Bali Process to develop more effective, dignified and durable regional responses to forced migration. We cannot let this momentum recede", said Sriprapha Petchamesree, from the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University, Thailand.

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