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## Global Compacts provide opportunity for improving regional responses to managing refugees and migrants at risk, including the Rohingya

Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration Co-Conveners call for ongoing, coordinated action

Following the seventh meeting of the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) in Bangkok, Thailand, last month, ADFM Co-Conveners have called on states to take more coordinated and sustained regional action to support the Rohingya population displaced in Bangladesh and Myanmar, and to find alternatives to child detention. Both recommendations build on the impetus provided by the recently adopted Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees to improve regional responses to managing refugees and migrants at risk.

The Global Compacts were overwhelmingly adopted this month: 164 countries adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) in Marrakesh on 10 December, and 181 countries voted in favour of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) at the UN General Assembly on 17 December. The near unanimous global support for the GCR is a welcome reminder of the willingness of countries to support refugees. The GCM also received widespread support, particularly from our region, demonstrating a clear resolve to tackle migration challenges together. The Compacts are historic milestones in refugee and migration governance and a great catalyst to reinvigorate progress in the region, including the role of existing regional forums, such as ASEAN and the Bali Process.

The ADFM recently conducted an assessment that highlighted a high risk of Rohingya refugees displaced in Cox's Bazar, and Bangladeshi nationals in the area, falling victim to migrant smuggling and human trafficking. This situation should be a catalyst for swift and coordinated regional action. It is not only in times of crisis that we need such coordinated regional action: there are also longer-term issues that would benefit from this, such as phasing out the detention of children in the context of migration, and addressing climate-related migration.

"This is a pivotal time for our region" said Sriprapha Petcharamesree from the Institute for Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University, and ADFM Co-Convenor: "ILO has just recorded a 20% increase in international migration numbers over four years, due largely to conflict and poverty. In the Asia-Pacific, we are dealing with the most significant displacement challenge in the world in Bangladesh and Myanmar, and we are trying to prevent and contain some of the highest global levels of human trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery. These issues touch every country in our neighbourhood and we can only manage them together, not alone."

"We applaud the countries who have backed the Global Compacts, particularly those in our region such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, and encourage those who have not signed on to do so. The Bali Process, which Australia co-chairs with Indonesia, should play an active role in the implementation of the Compacts" said Travers McLeod, Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for Policy Development and ADFM Co-Convenor.

"The Australian Prime Minister's decision not to join others in our region in adopting the GCM is disappointing. We hope that Australia's role in the implementation of the GCM regionally can be revisited. Otherwise, neighbours would be forgiven for doubting whether Australia is a credible and reliable partner in addressing regional forced migration."

“Ever since our first meeting, which took place in the midst of the Andaman Sea Crisis, the ADFM has been concerned about the Rohingya displacement crisis and its impact on people, communities and countries in the region” said Steven Wong, Deputy Chief Executive of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia and ADFM Co-Convenor.

“We recognise that Bangladesh and its international partners have delivered a generous and effective humanitarian response, but we are concerned about the intensifying risks of trafficking, smuggling and exploitation. Whether trickle or flood, it is not a matter of *if* large scale movements will occur but *when*. Safe, dignified, voluntary and sustainable repatriation of the Rohingya to Myanmar is the only durable answer to the current crisis. We also need to prevent the development of a ‘crisis within a crisis’ by mitigating the risk of loss of life and freedom associated with onward movement and exploitation.”

ADFM Co-Convenors agree there are significant steps regional actors can take to address the crisis: from boosting capacity in both Bangladesh and Myanmar to prevent and counter human trafficking; to targeted development assistance on both sides of the Naf river, benefitting both local and displaced populations, to address risk factors and assist people to prepare for eventual return and sustainable reintegration.

“We are heartened by the commitment arising from the ASEAN Summit to support Myanmar to create an environment conducive to safe, secure and dignified repatriation.” said Tri Nuke Pudjiastuti, Deputy Chair for Social Sciences and Humanities at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, and ADFM Co-Convenor. “We welcome the invitation extended by Myanmar to the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) to carry out a needs assessment in Rakhine State. It is right for ASEAN to be playing this role and the ADFM continues to stand ready to assist ASEAN in its work with migrants at risk.”

Another migration issue on which the Global Compacts can stimulate coordinated action is in finding alternatives to placing children in detention in the context of international migration.

“Placing displaced children in detention is a harmful but often used part of migration processing in the region. There is growing political momentum to move away from this practice, with a number of countries in the region now attempting to phase out child detention. Other countries are interested but want to learn more about alternative approaches from their peers” said Sriprapha Petchamesree.

The ADFM is a Track II regional forum for independent and inclusive policy development on forced migration issues. Members include senior policy shapers from government and non-government agencies from Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Thailand, Bangladesh, the Philippines, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and the International Organisation for Migration. The ADFM has met seven times since August 2015, in cities across the Asia-Pacific.

Between May and October this year, the ADFM Secretariat conducted an assessment of the risks of human trafficking, migrant smuggling and related exploitation arising from the situation in Cox’s Bazar, where approximately 1.1 million Rohingya are now displaced.

The ADFM will next meet in Jakarta, Indonesia in mid-2019, and continue to advance effective, durable and dignified responses to refugees and migrants at risk in the region.

*The agenda and participant list of the seventh ADFM meeting are available on the CPD website ([www.cpd.org.au](http://www.cpd.org.au)).*

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