

Summary of ADFM Meeting on Bali Process Reform 24 March 2022

The Secretariat of the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) was pleased to hear general support and enthusiasm for recommendations on reforming the Bali Process at the eleventh ADFM meeting, held virtually on 24 March 2022. The meeting focused on the twentieth anniversary of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime (Bali Process), and featured high-level participation, including two distinguished foreign ministers, senior government officials from eight countries in the region, as well as international and national civil society organisations. As the ADFM meeting was held under the Chatham House Rule, what follows is a summary of the main themes of discussions without attribution.

Region facing serious forced migration challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and natural disasters, and conflicts including in Ukraine, Afghanistan and Myanmar, have all significantly exacerbated the drivers of forced migration. These factors create a series of cascading challenges that disproportionately affect those most vulnerable, including the Rohingya community. It was emphasised that threats are likely to increase as we emerge from the pandemic, and that more needs to be done to address existing drivers of forced migration and to plan ahead for future drivers. One senior participant emphasised the importance of moving outside narrow understandings of security and being creative in our responses to challenges. Those working on the ground highlighted the urgency of the situation, including rising tensions in Rakhine State.

Stronger regional collaboration is needed to tackle these challenges effectively. Forced migration can only be effectively dealt with in collaborative, humane and adaptive ways, with countries pooling resources and working together. Participants agreed that having the Bali Process as a dedicated forum to discuss issues related to human trafficking and migrant smuggling remained very valuable. Given the role of the Bali Process as our region's only cooperative body that brings together source, transit and destination countries to discuss these issues, it remains an important part of the region's architecture. Participants emphasised that the Bali Process must be agile and responsive = to the region's changing needs, and that this need not necessarily change the voluntary, non-binding nature of the mechanism.

The Bali Process is a valuable forum that would benefit from reform. There was general support for reinvigoration of the Bali Process by most of those in the meeting, and much detailed feedback shared about the specific reform recommendations proposed by the ADFM Secretariat. Particular recommendations that received support in the meeting included:

- Prioritising early warning capabilities and ensuring the Taskforce on Planning and Preparedness fulfils its forward-looking mandate in order to prepare for and respond to future displacement crises.
- Investing in technical capabilities and less formal meetings in order to make the most of the Bali Process's strengths in capacity-building, particularly as we emerge from the pandemic.
- Strengthening and clarifying the mandate of the Regional Support Office (RSO) to allow it to carry out its important role, including greater engagement before and after virtual meetings.
- Streamlining existing workstreams and groups, based on a stocktake of what members most value.

- Elevating engagement with other regional bodies including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and also the private sector through the Government and Business Forum (GABF).

The proposal to consider adding a third rotating Co-Chair position and preconditions for Bali Process membership received less support during the meeting, and some participants raised questions over how this would work in practice. The ADFM Secretariat will further develop this idea and step out potential ways this could operate, for consideration. Regardless of whether this idea is taken forward, it is worth considering ways the Bali Process can strengthen member engagement and diversity of leadership.

The mandate of the Bali Process is worth reflecting on. Participants discussed the origins of the Bali Process' mandate, and whether or not it remains best-suited to the challenges now facing the region, twenty years on. Most participants agreed the mandate could be more ambitious, with some suggesting it could be broadened or reframed to better address the region's evolving challenges. While many recognised the value of the technical-level discussions and capacity building facilitated by the Bali Process, there was also interest in facilitating more political-level discussions to progress issues at senior and ministerial level.

Forward-planning and stocktaking would be beneficial. While many in the meeting reminded the group of the urgency of responding to current crises, there were also important reminders to be prepared for future crises. Participants expressed support for the idea of a stocktake of the Bali Process to inform the best way to streamline workstreams and groups, particularly on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary. It was suggested the ADFM Secretariat would be well placed to conduct this stocktake.

Next steps.

As a result of the meeting, the ADFM Secretariat has agreed to take the following actions:

- Begin work on a stocktake of the Bali Process to determine the most effective structures and working groups going forward, ahead of the twentieth anniversary.
- Convene a follow up virtual ADFM meeting in June (date TBC) to discuss regional trends in forced migration and what more can be done collectively to respond including bilaterally and mini-laterally.
- Conduct a strategic assessment of regional priorities for forced migration responses over the next 5-10 years, including the role of the Bali Process.

The ADFM Secretariat will be in touch with participants individually about these next steps. We welcome ideas for collaboration or further engagement on any of these actions.