



# The Bali Process

on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime

## **Bali Process Taskforce on Planning and Preparedness Seventh Annual Meeting Co-Chair Statement *9-10 November 2023***

The Seventh Annual Meeting of the Bali Process Taskforce on Planning and Preparedness (TFPP) was held on 10 November 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand. The meeting was co-convened at the Senior Official level by Indonesia and Australia. The meeting was co-chaired by the Director for International Security and Disarmament of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Mr. Caka Alverdi Awal, and the Director for Counter People Smuggling of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ms. Suzanne Griffiths. The meeting brought together participants from the Bali Process Ad Hoc Group, including policy and operational representatives, observers, and civil society.

The meeting was preceded by a TFPP Policy Experts Group meeting (PEG) on 9 November 2023. The PEG assessed the status of current policy, legislative and regulatory frameworks to adequately address the cross-jurisdictional drivers of trafficking into online scam compounds. Experts focussed on the role of large-scale profits generated by transnational organised crime from trafficking into online scam operations, as a driver for the current trends in the region and made recommendations for the Bali Process to coordinate regional action on harmonising legislation and policy efforts, law enforcement cooperation and enhancing private sector engagement.

The TFPP PEG and Seventh Annual Meeting were attended by 14 members (Australia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)), seven additional Bali Process members as observers (Fiji, Kiribati, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Timor-Leste, and Vanuatu). International Labour Organization (ILO) also attended as an observer.

Presentations from experts from UNODC and The Royal Thai Police, Department of Special Investigations and civil society organisation, International Justice Mission provided members with a contextual overview of the increased online scamming activities in the Mekong, and



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panellist's perspectives on the policy, legal and regulatory frameworks in order to respond to the cross-jurisdictional nature of trafficking in persons into online scam centres.

The TFPP PEG identified at least four challenges that hinder the efforts in combatting this crime, namely:

- (1) the limited ability of law enforcement to physically access the physical location of scam centres,
- (2) the difficulty of member governments to cooperate on investigation and prosecution due to lengthy processes and jurisdictional discrepancies,
- (3) the unregulated cyber environment which has fostered money laundering, underground banking and related cybercrime which facilitates the exploitation of victims, and
- (4) the role of corruption and complicity in the region. The impact of protracted regional conflict was recognised as an additional pressure on cross-jurisdictional cooperation to respond to the crime.

Members agreed that the growing scale and complexity of the issue demands a coordinated, cross-sector at regional response to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement and break down barriers to cooperation. Members also identified the value of the Bali Process continuing to facilitate closer regional cooperation. The PEG fostered member understanding of the complex nature of people smuggling and trafficking in persons in poly-criminal environments and emphasised the importance of harmonising regional efforts.

Whilst the PEG was delivered through the example of trafficking in persons into online scams, the resulting recommendations to strengthen and enhance cross-jurisdictional legislative, policy and regulatory frameworks are applicable across many drivers of irregular migration.

The annual meeting built upon the discussions of the PEG by considering the changing global and regional context and challenges, and how the TFPP could address the emerging forms of people smuggling, trafficking in persons and other related transnational crimes, while also maintaining attention on the persistent challenges of irregular migration in the region.

Co-Chairs reflected on the priorities and activities of the TFPP since the Sixth Annual Meeting of the TFPP in July 2021, including the PEG discussion in July 2022 and a tabletop exercise in October 2022. Co-Chairs encouraged members to consider the evolution of people smuggling and trafficking in persons context since it was established in 2016.

The meeting included expert presentations on effective information campaigns as a means of prevention by the IOM, the role of civil registrations and certification to reduce vulnerability to



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exploitation and irregular migration (presented by the Bali Process Regional Support Office/RSO), and opportunities to collaborate across the Bali Process Working Groups and the Bali Process RSO, in line with the direction of the 2023 Adelaide Strategy for Cooperation.

Members outlined regional and country-specific priorities and challenges; spoke to the importance of coordinated law enforcement efforts and cohesive regional policies; the value of prevention and victim-centred approaches to protection; the continued role of the Consultation Mechanism in responding to urgent irregular migration events in the region, and the promotion of regular pathways to migration.

Co-Chairs reiterated the importance of the Bali Process as the premier regional forum to exchange member perspectives on people smuggling and trafficking in persons, identify best practice approaches, develop member capacity and foster timely information sharing.

From the discussions in the two sessions, members highlighted three areas emerged for future focus for the TFPP, namely: .

- (1) harmonisation and coordination of law enforcement and operational protocols in the region,
- (2) collaborating with other Bali Process workstreams to build a network of expertise in the situation of a sudden, mass migration movement, and
- (3) continued provision of training and capacity building opportunities for frontline border officials as areas of priority for the TFPP.

Members also expressed significant interest in further capacity building opportunities on victim identification and protection as well as in investigations, and ensuring all responses to irregular migration are victim-centred.

Co-Chairs re-iterated their grave concern regarding the continued irregular maritime movement of vulnerable Rohingya populations, by land and sea, from Bangladesh and Myanmar. Members remained energised around the need to respond to the root causes of conflict.

Co-Chairs noted the views and recommendations from the TFPP membership and will consider how best to implement these within the existing framework and mandate of the Bali Process. The meeting concluded with the Co-Chairs expressing thanks to all members, observers and civil society representatives for their contributions and participation.