19TH AD HOC GROUP SENIOR OFFICIALS' MEETING

CO-CHAIRS' STATEMENT

28 AUGUST 2026, BANGKOK, THAILAND

The 19th Ad Hoc Group Senior Officials' Meeting of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime (Bali Process) was convened by the Bali Process Senior Official Co-Chairs, Ambassador to Counter Modern Slavery, People Smuggling and Human Trafficking, Jane Duke, of Australia, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Secretary General, Denny Abdi, of Indonesia, on 28 August 2026 in Bangkok, Thailand.

2. Bali Process Ad Hoc Group member representatives from Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, Viet Nam, International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) participated. Representatives from Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Timor-Leste and the United Kingdom attended as observers. The Co-Managers of the Bali Process Regional Support Office (RSO) and Government and Business Forum (GABF) representatives also participated.

Global and regional developments

3. The meeting noted with concern that the people smuggling, trafficking in persons and related transnational crime challenges facing the region were evolving and escalating. The political and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar continued to drive displacement and irregular migration across the region. The Co-Chairs expressed their deep concern that Rohingya refugees continued to lose their lives during dangerous maritime journeys in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal, including recent tragic incidents in late June and early July in which 530 people reportedly died at sea after departing Myanmar. The meeting noted UNHCR reporting that 2025 had been the deadliest year on record for maritime movements by Rohingya refugees–a trend that was continuing in 2026.

4. The meeting expressed serious concern about the proliferation of online scam operations in the region and globally. The continued expansion of trafficking for forced criminality into online scam operations was a significant and rapidly evolving form of transnational organised crime. These operations were hubs of poly-criminality, linked to forced labour, cyber fraud, debt bondage, money laundering and serious organised crime. Scams-related losses across East and Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand were estimated to be up to USD 114.1 billion in 2025.[1]

[1] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), An Interconnected Criminal Ecosystem: Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment for South-East Asia (Vienna: UNODC, 2026), 4, UNODC Publications.

5. The meeting noted with concern that conflict-induced displacement remained at historically high levels. UNHCR reported that at the end of 2025 there were approximately 17.6 million refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced people, stateless people, returnees and other people in need of international protection in Asia and the Pacific.

20th Steering Group Senior Officials' Meeting

6. Co-Chairs reported on the 20th Bali Process Steering Group Senior Officials' Meeting on 27 August 2026 in Bangkok. The meeting noted the important role of the Steering Group in guiding the governance and strategic direction of the Bali Process.

Implementation of 2023 Adelaide Strategy for Cooperation

7. The meeting noted continued progress in implementing the 2023 Adelaide Strategy for Cooperation through the activities, policy development, capacity building, preparedness exercises and research led by Working Groups and the RSO, focused on countering people smuggling, trafficking in persons, online scam operations, irregular migration and transnational crime. More than 200 activities had been undertaken across eight areas of cooperation since the Adelaide Strategy was launched in 2023.

Bali Process 25th Anniversary (2027)

8. The meeting agreed on the importance of marking the 25th anniversary of the Bali Process in 2027. The meeting reflected on the Bali Process' ongoing relevance and strategic value as region's only dedicated forum of its kind and noted the forum's significant achievements since its establishment in 2002. Opportunities for an engagement at the ministerial level were being explored. Planning was also underway to mark the 25th anniversary through activities led by the RSO and Working Groups.

Working Group updates

Working Group on Trafficking in Persons (WG-TIP)

9. WG-TIP Co-Chairs (Australia and Indonesia) noted that the 11th WG-TIP Annual Meeting was held in Manila in December 2025, jointly delivered with the Technical Experts Group on Returns and Reintegration (TEG-RR). Delegates considered options to strengthen regional responses to trafficking for forced criminality into online scam operations and the growing links between trafficking in persons and other forms of transnational crime. The RSO and ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking program highlighted approaches to improving victim identification and application of the non-punishment principle. Delegates also examined the links between trafficking and forced marriage, informed by research undertaken by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime and the ASEAN Guidelines for Addressing Child and Forced Marriage within the Context of Trafficking in Persons.

10. WG-TIP and the Task Force on Planning and Preparedness (TFPP) were planning for a joint program of events in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in October 2026.

11. WG-TIP Co-Chairs noted their ongoing work, including with member leads for action items, to implement the WG-TIP Forward Work Plan 2024-26.

Technical Experts Group on Returns and Reintegration (TEG-RR)

12. TEG-RR Co-Chairs (Australia and the Philippines) noted that the eighth annual Meeting of the TEG-RR (December 2025, held alongside the WG-TIP) focused on the importance of full-cycle and whole-of-society approaches to returns and reintegration. Delegates discussed emerging drivers of trafficking and irregular migration, including online scam operations and labour exploitation, and considered practical approaches to safe return, long-term reintegration, information sharing and cross-border cooperation. Site visits showcased the Philippines' whole-of-cycle approach to migrant worker support, trafficking disruption, airport and maritime interventions, and victim-centred responses.

13. TEG-RR Co-Chairs noted progress on the Returns and Reintegration Register—a practical information sharing product that captures member updates on regional returns and reintegration settings and supports liaison between relevant agencies and organisations. TEG-RR was also progressing the refresh of the 2019 Bali Process Policy Guide on Returns and Reintegration in partnership with the RSO.

14. TEG-RR Co-Chairs further noted the Pacific Mapping Workshop held in Fiji in May 2026, which convened Pacific officials to discuss return pathways, transit arrangements, information sharing, policy gaps and community-based reintegration. Participants mapped national returns and reintegration processes, identified operational challenges, and considered opportunities to strengthen regional coordination and practical cooperation.

15. The TEG-RR was planning for its ninth meeting in November 2026 in Malaysia.

Working Group on the Disruption of Criminal Networks Involved in People Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons (DWG)

16. DWG Co-Chairs, New Zealand and Viet Nam noted the Disruption Working Group's continued focus on practical, action-oriented cooperation to disrupt criminal networks involved in people smuggling and trafficking in persons across the region. The DWG convened the Bali Process Tabletop Exercise in Bangkok from 23–26 June 2025—the first combined activity with all four Bali Process Working Groups. The exercise provided an opportunity to test regional coordination and responses to complex irregular migration, trafficking in persons and transnational crime scenarios. Scenario-based discussions tested interagency coordination, legal frameworks, and operational readiness in response to complex migration challenges. The exercise reinforced the value of coordinated planning across the Bali Process architecture.

17. DWG Co-Chairs noted that discussions were underway with the RSO on a review of the current DWG operating model. The review, expected to be completed in early 2027, would consider opportunities to strengthen the DWG and ensure activities remained aligned with regional priorities and support continued member engagement and cooperation.

18. DWG Co-Chairs advised that a future Bali Process Tabletop Exercise was under consideration for early 2027, building on the success of the 2025 exercise. In addition, consideration was being given to convening an annual DWG meeting in 2027.

Task Force on Planning and Preparedness (TFPP)

19. Indonesian and Australian TFPP Co-Chairs reported on the TFPP's engagement in supporting regional preparedness during 2025. TFPP representatives participated in the RSO's Crisis Preparedness Forum in September 2025, contributing to discussions on preparedness and coordinated responses to irregular migration situations arising from natural disasters and humanitarian crises. TFPP representatives' participation in other Working Group meetings strengthened information sharing and preparedness in relation to irregular migration situations.

20. TFPP Co-Chairs reported that the TFPP would hold its ninth annual meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka in October 2026, alongside the annual meeting of the WG-TIP. The meeting would focus on building the region's preparedness through a tabletop exercise designed to strengthen understanding of how Bali Process members establish and maintain situational awareness, exchange information, and coordinate regional responses during a rapidly evolving irregular maritime migration crisis.

Regional Support Office (RSO) update

21. The Indonesian and Australian RSO Co-Managers reported on the RSO's support for practical cooperation across the Bali Process' mandate. Since May 2025, the RSO delivered, co-delivered or contributed to more than 120 trainings, workshops, dialogues and engagements across 19 countries, helping members anticipate emerging challenges, strengthen capability and connect policy with operational practice. In that time, the RSO also led more than 25 targeted capacity-building activities reaching over 1,450 officials. Activities focused on border management and screening, online investigations and open-source intelligence, countering trafficking in persons, people smuggling investigations, combatting trafficking for forced criminality linked to online scam operations, and victim identification and protection responses.

22. An important development in the RSO's efforts to counter irregular maritime migration was the establishment of the Regional Information, Liaison and Outreach Network Initiative (RILON) Maritime People Smuggling Response Group. RILON brought together frontline practitioners and policy counterparts from Australia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Timor-Leste to support timely, actionable, non-operationally sensitive information sharing. The RSO also delivered the International People Smuggling Investigations Program (IPSIP) in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, in September 2025. Covering maritime, land and air smuggling routes, the program enhanced practitioners' ability to investigate and disrupt people-smuggling networks. Complementing this effort, the RSO convened a Workshop on Disrupting the Logistics of People Smuggling in Colombo in November 2025, bringing together law enforcement and border management officials to map, analyse and disrupt the operational networks underpinning people smuggling.

23. Co-Managers highlighted RSO research on community perceptions and information needs of persons at risk of irregular migration, drawing on more than 650 surveys and interviews across Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. Other outputs included research that examined trafficking for forced criminality, deceptive recruitment practices and challenges associated with victim identification. Co-Managers also noted development of the RSO Research Strategy 2026–2030.

24. Partnerships remained central to delivery. The RSO had worked with UNHCR to advance the regional pilot of the Screening and Referral Toolkit across 12 member states; collaborated with

IOM on responses to emerging forms of trafficking and frontline capacity-building; and partnered with UNODC on regional cooperation to address trafficking for forced criminality and related transnational crime. The RSO also supported activities with Indonesia's Directorate General of Immigration, UNITAR CIFAL Jeju, and Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It also continued to strengthen partnerships with other regional mechanisms, including the Budapest Process, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking (ASEAN-ACT).

25. Looking ahead, Co-Managers welcomed efforts to strengthen the sustainability of RSO activities through finalisation of a Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning Framework, development of a Capacity Development Approach, growth of the Alumni Network to more than 300 members, and establishment of the RSO Knowledge Hub. The RSO Strategic Work Plan 2026-28 was being finalised.

Government and Business Forum (GABF) update

26. Representatives of the GABF reported on efforts to strengthen cooperation between governments and the private sector to address trafficking in persons, forced labour and exploitation in supply chains. The meeting noted that the 10th anniversary of the GABF in 2027 could be a timely opportunity to reflect on the GABF's contribution to increasingly complex challenges that governments and businesses were facing related to supply chain transparency, ethical recruitment and worker protection.