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MONTHLY UPDATES

The 4th COMMIT Sub-regional Plan of Action

The SPAIV was officially adopted at the COMMIT Senior Officials and Inter-Ministerial Meeting at the end of April. The endorsement marked the end of a year-long development process that set new standards for inclusivity and participation in COMMIT, resulting in an agreement that is more results-based and comprehensive in scope than any of its predecessors.

The process kicked off with the development of a zero draft by key regional anti-trafficking stakeholders from the United Nations, international organizations and civil society as commissioned by the COMMIT governments. The draft subsequently went through a series of governmental consultations at both national and regional level, and at times involving non-governmental partners as well, before its finalization and adoption. The outcome is a results-oriented agreement including a commitment to monitoring progress against a set of indicators and targets. SPAIV is significantly more inclusive than its predecessors, specifically referring to all sectors of society being engaged in both implementation and monitoring, including civil society.

Content:
The involved governments have committed themselves to delivering against 8 ‘Goals’, in the 4 ‘P’s of COMMIT anti-trafficking efforts, i.e. policy/cooperation, prevention, protection and prosecution. Each ‘Goal’ has varying numbers of ‘Outcomes’, which are further divided into ‘Outputs’. These results are supported by a set of ‘indicative activities’, which serve as operational guidance for COMMIT governments but are flexible to allow for differences between countries. Selected highlights of SPAIV include a commitment to building a common understanding of human trafficking in line with the Palermo Protocol; a recognition that strengthened migrant workers’ recruitment systems are key to trafficking prevention; the deliberate engagement of civil society, media and the private sector in counter-trafficking interventions; a commitment to establishing National Referral Mechanisms for trafficking cases; stronger bi- and multi-lateral cooperation in criminal justice matters related to trafficking; or a much improved M&E system to monitor progress in SPAIV implementation.

Way Forward:
SPAIV provides a framework agreement for COMMIT at the sub-regional level and for the next four years. It hence needs to be operationalized further through the development of annual COMMIT work plans at the national level. In line with SPAIV, the development and implementation of such work plans is meant to involve all key anti-trafficking stakeholders, thereby helping to coordinate their respective interventions through COMMIT.

This especially relates to the role of civil society organizations, whose status in COMMIT has been significantly enhanced through SPAIV. They are starting to organize themselves to participate in COMMIT through the Civil Society Platform, which convened for the first time both nationally and regionally in the lead up to COMMIT SOM/IMM. The Civil Society Platform addressed Senior Officials and Ministers through the first-ever dedicated CSO session at such meetings. The reformed COMMIT Youth Forum is equally expected to play a stronger role, both nationally and regionally, especially through their engagement in the prevention pillar of SPAIV.

UN-ACT, as the Secretariat to the COMMIT Process, will continue to advocate for a more inclusive and participatory COMMIT Process, and to encourage and facilitate more strategic cooperation and coordination of anti-trafficking interventions, especially at the regional level. We look forward to engaging with governmental and non-governmental actors, UN agencies and other international organizations towards this goal, as part of our support to the implementation of SPAIV.

You can download the SPAIV from our website, by clicking here.
CAMBODIA
• 118 Cambodian fishermen were rescued from Thai vessels in Indonesian sea and another 59 rescued in May were safely returned to Cambodia. One more group of 59 rescued in the same month were also repatriated.
• A woman aged 39 charged with human trafficking by Kompong Cham Provincial Court confessed to trafficking over a dozen people by tricking them into traveling to work in Malaysia under false pretenses.
• 3 Chinese nationals were charged with attempting to traffic 4 Cambodian teenagers to China.

CHINA
• A major trans-national trafficking in persons case was cracked by Kunming Railway Police. After a criminal investigation that took over 5 months, 18 criminal suspects were arrested. 12 Vietnamese women had been deceived into traveling to China with the offers of employment and marriage opportunities but were trafficked into Xinhua, Hunan Province. As a result of the investigation they were rescued and repatriated to Vietnam.

LAO PDR
• The Law on Violence against Women and Children, which was approved late last year, has now been enacted.
• The AAPTIP database development workshop was held in June, led by the Anti Trafficking Department, and included discussion on victim ID curriculum development and victim/witness friendly interview procedures.
• UN-ACT is providing support to 8 Lao victims in Indonesia to return to Laos with the help of the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other UN agency and civil society partners.

MYANMAR
• 382 out of 535 migrant workers/trafficked victims identified so far have been repatriated from Indonesia and are set to return to Myanmar. The government is supporting their travel arrangements and providing for temporary shelter before they return to their homes. Private airline KBZ has agreed to provide domestic air tickets, and other needs are being addressed by the IOM, with support from World Vision Myanmar.

THAILAND
• As a result of human trafficking and smuggling crackdown in Southern Thailand, over 50 police and immigration officials as well as politicians have been investigated and transferred; 26 suspects involved in Rohingya human trafficking were arrested; assets worth over 204 million baht have been seized from human trafficking networks. In addition, arrest warrants have been issued against 61 people.
• Thailand hosted a special meeting on irregular migration in the Indian Ocean with high level representatives from 17 countries, along with UNHCR, UNODC, IOM and UNRC. Key recommendations were developed on immediate response to protect people stranded at sea, comprehensive prevention of irregular migration, smuggling of migrants, and trafficking in persons, including address root causes and improving livelihood in at-risk communities.
• Nearly 600 people have been rescued or identified to be repatriated in Tual and Benjina.

VIETNAM
• Central Provinces of Vietnam have become a source of Vietnamese people migrating to Thailand to work irregularly. Thailand has about 100,000 Vietnamese workers according to the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social affairs out of which 10,000 are from Ha Tinh (a Central Province), with many of them staying to work illegally in a variety of industries.
• An investigative report from the Guardian found that Vietnamese make up the largest group of children trafficked to the UK. Some 3000 children trafficked from Vietnam are being exploited by criminal gangs and forced to work in cannabis farms.
Special meeting on irregular migration in the Indian Ocean

Foreign Minister Tanasak Patimapragorn called the meeting of 17 countries and various international organizations regarding the Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrant crisis in Bangkok on 29 May. However, at least three of the countries central to the crisis were not sending ministers: Myanmar, Indonesia and Malaysia. Many cautioned that the session was unlikely to produce a binding agreement or plan of action. Bangkok Post

Thai general faces a total of 13 charges

An arrest warrant was issued for the senior officer for his alleged role as the ringleader of a major trafficking operation in southern Thailand of the Rohingya and other migrants. Lieutenant General Manas Khongpaen, a special adviser in the Army, insisted he was innocent. Police have charged him with conspiring to traffic humans, including children aged 15 or younger, allowing illegal migrants to enter the country, illegally detaining other people and being involved in cross-border human trafficking activities, among other offences. The Nation

Human traffickers in China are likely to face tougher penalties

The revision to the provision concerning child trafficking aims to increase penalties for those who buy children. Under the modified provision, anyone buying a child would not be able to claim immunity from punishment, but buyers would receive a less severe penalty if they did not abuse the child or attempt to hinder rescue efforts. Police rescued more than 13,000 abducted children last year. Nearly an equal number of people involved in human trafficking were punished from 2010 to last year, according to the Supreme People’s Court, and more than half received sentences ranging from at least five years in prison to death. The Indian Express

Child labour masked as vocational training thieves

Many factory owners in Ho Chi Minh City, camouflaging as recruiters looking for potential vocational students, lure children from remote areas in the Central Highlands province of Dak Lak into child labour. Besides harsh and illegal working conditions, such “vocational training contracts” also denied wages for child labourers who decided to run away. Many children are often tempted to leave their families behind due to poverty and little awareness. And without any address or phone number of workplaces available, parents cannot go find their children and bring them back. Vietnam News
**Myanmar repatriated 150 rescued migrants to Bangladesh**

The first batch of 150 migrants rescued from trafficking boats originally bound for Malaysia off Myanmar’s coast were repatriated across the Myanmar-Bangladesh border. After an elaborate consular process, Dhaka agreed to take back only 150 of 208 migrants. More than fifty migrants from the same vessel remain in makeshift camps in northern Rakhine State. Another 735 people rescued by the Myanmar navy, including nearly 120 women and children, were taken to shelters near the border. The government says nationality verification of the second group is ongoing.

*Myanmar Times*

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**Thai authorities handed trafficking suspects to Malaysia**

Home Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said that several Malaysians suspected for being involved with human trafficking syndicates in Wang Kelian, Perils, have been arrested by authorities. He added that the police had identified more than three kingpins responsible for the human trafficking ring involving Malaysia and several countries, including Thailand and Myanmar. Ahmad Zahid said the government is in the process of extraditing Yassin, a key suspect in the human trafficking at Wang Kelian, who is believed to be the agent responsible for “buying” Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants from a syndicate operating in southern Thailand.

*Channel News Asia*

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**Trafficked fishermen return to Cambodia**

The government of Cambodia repatriated a group of 230 Cambodian labourers to the Kingdom from Indonesia’s Ambon Island. The Embassy in Indonesia was alerted about the existence of the trafficked fishermen after Thai fishing trawlers were taken to Ambon Island by Indonesian authorities. It prepared travel documents for the trafficked men and demanded that the owner of the fishing boats pay their flights home, as well as salaries owed.

*Khmer Times*
Regional Network Meeting

The Regional Network Meeting (RNM), a quarterly event bringing together UN agencies, international organizations and NGOs working regionally to counter human trafficking in Southeast and East Asia, met again in Bangkok, Thailand on June 9, 2015. The morning session was dedicated to an exchange among partners on project implementation, experiences and challenges over the previous 3 months, and plans going forward thereby allowing for synergies and opportunities for joint interventions to be identified.

For the afternoon session, the RNM typically sets a thematic focus for more detailed discussions, often with the involvement of external speakers. This time around, the focus was on ‘advocacy in anti-trafficking,’ and 3 guest speakers were invited to introduce and discuss different angles and approaches. Karen Emmons (independent journalist and writer) explored the advocacy role of her “No One Should Work This Way” project, promoting the rights of foreign domestic workers and the ratification of ILO Convention 189. Fiona David (Walk Free Foundation) outlined how Walk Free’s Global Slavery Index is used for advocacy purposes through the Walk Free Movement, and Tara Dermott (IOMX) highlighted the IOMX’s youth engagement as an advocacy tool to bring about behavior changes.
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