

**JOINT PERIOD OF ACTION DEBRIEF WORKSHOP  
OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE DISRUPTION OF PEOPLE SMUGGLING AND  
TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS NETWORKS**

**BANGKOK, THAILAND  
25 NOVEMBER 2015**

**CO-CHAIRS' STATEMENT**

1. On 19 May 2015, the inaugural meeting of the Working Group on the Disruption of People Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons Networks [the Working Group] under the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime [the Bali Process] was held in Bangkok, Thailand. Ad Hoc Group (AHG) participants expressed their support for a Joint Period of Action initiative to be carried out as part of the Working Group.
2. In early September 2015, the Governments of New Zealand and Sri Lanka, as co-chairs of the Working Group, convened a two-day planning meeting in Bangkok, Thailand to develop the Joint Period of Action concept. Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, New Zealand, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand as well as INTERPOL agreed to participate in the Joint Period of Action.
3. The Joint Period of Action itself was carried out from 28 September to 28 October 2015. During this period, law enforcement and immigration agencies from the eight participating countries took part in separate, but coordinated law enforcement operations against people smuggling and trafficking in persons networks. Trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation was investigated across a wide range of sectors, including agriculture, farming, fishing, beauty services, and domestic work. Criminal networks involved in the online commercial sexual exploitation of children were also targeted.
4. On 25 November 2015, the co-chairs of the Working Group invited the AHG to attend a Joint Period of Action Debrief Workshop in Bangkok, Thailand. In attendance were law enforcement and immigration officials from Afghanistan, Australia, India, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, New Zealand, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the United States of America (USA), and Viet Nam. Law enforcement officials from Canada and INTERPOL also participated.
5. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss what outcomes were achieved, what worked well, what did not work well, and what should be done differently. The next steps under the Working Group were also discussed.

## Proceedings

6. The Co-Chairs of the Working Group, Kapila Waidyaratne, Additional Solicitor General, Sri Lankan Attorney General's Department and Head of the Trafficking and Smuggling Unit, and Steve Stuart, General Manager, Compliance, Risk and Intelligence Services (CRIS), Immigration New Zealand warmly welcomed AHG participants to the debrief workshop.
7. During their opening remarks, the co-chairs reflected on the progress made since the forward work plan was set at the Roundtable on Migration and Transnational Crime in September 2014. Participants were reminded of the core focus of the Working Group, which is to promote concrete, action-oriented activities for enhancing coordination to disrupt and dismantle criminal networks involved in people smuggling and trafficking in persons in the Asia-Pacific region. The co-chairs noted that the Joint Period of Action proved to be a successful initiative that ensured the Working Group met its objectives. However, they stressed that this was just an initial start. The purpose of this workshop was to share lessons learnt as well as ideas about how the Working Group could be even more successful.
8. The Joint Period of Action was carried out from 28 September to 28 October, 2015. During this period, law enforcement and immigration agencies from the eight participating countries took part in separate, but coordinated law enforcement operations against people smuggling and trafficking in persons networks.

In total, authorities in the eight countries:

- assisted 59 trafficked persons
  - executed seven search warrants and identified 63 suspects
  - made 32 arrests and launched eight new investigations
  - made over 70 bilateral and international enquires to progress trafficking in persons and people smuggling investigations
  - conducted 68 awareness-raising activities, including for employers, civil society, and vulnerable groups
  - carried out 12 training sessions and trained 485 police, airport, immigration, and compliance officers throughout the region
  - gathered useful intelligence on the traffickers and smugglers involved and their modus operandi
9. The co-chairs of the Working Group were extremely pleased with the results. Yet, they pointed out that these outcomes were just an illustration of what can be achieved when countries work together.

10. Participants outlined what worked well and what did not work well during the Joint Period of Action. Suggestions were also made as to what could be done differently if the Working Group undertook a similar initiative next year.
11. During the debrief session, participants noted that the Joint Period of Action was a good test of inter-agency mechanisms to address trafficking in persons and people smuggling. What needed to be strengthened, however, was cross border cooperation among law enforcement as well as engagement with INTERPOL.
12. Participants remarked that the criminal networks involved in these crimes are highly flexible and able to collaborate across borders. They believed that further operational successes could be achieved if countries worked more closely together. To do this, participants suggested that operational activities under the Working Group be more tightly focused. Rather than taking part in separate, but coordinated law enforcement operations, joint investigations could be established to further improve cooperation.
13. Participants suggested two or more countries could agree to carry out investigations into specific cases over a particular period of time. Participating countries could identify specific networks / syndicates at the next planning meeting in May 2016 to investigate during the next joint initiative. These operational meetings were seen as important as they allowed law enforcement officials to meet regularly and exchange operational information about ongoing cases.
14. Another lesson was that only a handful of countries had worked through INTERPOL's National Central Bureaus (NCBs). NCBs are useful at linking national police to INTERPOL's global network, including its databases and other tools and technologies. Practical examples were shared about how INTERPOL can add value to cross-border investigations and operations.
15. After the debrief session, the co-chairs provided an overview of the proposed communications approach. New Zealand signalled that it planned to discuss with the Bali Process co-chairs the possibility of a joint media statement announcing the results of the Joint Period of Action. The draft media release was shared with participants, and countries were encouraged to work with the Working Group co-chairs if they intended to release a national media statement on the Joint Period of Action. Australia and New Zealand signalled their intention to issue national media statements once the regional media statement had gone out.
16. Australia provided an update on the upcoming Bali Process meetings, including the Steering Group meeting and the AHG Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) being held in Bangkok on 1-2 February, 2016. It was noted that the Working Group's achievements would be reported to the Steering Group and AHG SOM as well as the next full Bali Process SOM and Ministerial meeting tentatively scheduled for the 22-23 March 2016.

## Recommendations and Next Steps

17. The last session summarised the recommendations that emerged from the debrief workshop, which included:

- strengthening cross border cooperation among law enforcement
- ensuring more tightly focused operational activities
- identifying specific networks / syndicates for investigation
- establishing bilateral or multilateral cross border investigations
- strengthening engagement with INTERPOL
- continuing involvement of identified focal points to ensure consistency within the Group

18. Further suggestions were made by participants, including strengthened cooperation and synergies with the Working Group on Trafficking in Persons. It was proposed that regular updates could be provided to the groups on their respective activities.

19. In conclusion, the co-chairs of the Working Group agreed to develop an operational programme for 2016 that built on the successes and lessons learned. Australia, Malaysia, Maldives, New Zealand, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand as well as INTERPOL expressed their commitment to ongoing joint initiatives and activities under the Working Group.<sup>1</sup> The next Working Group meeting will be held in May 2016 in either Bangkok or Colombo.

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<sup>1</sup> The Indonesian participant took ill prior to the Joint Period of Action Debrief Workshop and was unable to attend.