

**Minister Chris Bowen
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Bali Process Ministerial Meeting
AUSTRALIA COUNTRY STATEMENT**

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People smuggling and trafficking

Co-Chairs, ministers, distinguished delegates, it is a great pleasure to be here today, and I would like to extend Australia's thanks to Indonesia for hosting this event.

Australia, like many other countries, continues to receive large numbers of irregular arrivals. Many of these people are risking their lives and those of their families by using the services of people smugglers. The dangerous nature of maritime people smuggling ventures was again tragically apparent last December when, in heavy seas, a boat was lost against the rocks at Christmas Island resulting in at least 30 people losing their lives.

In the two years since ministers last met in Bali, countries have continued to enhance law enforcement and border security measures. As tasked by Ministers the Ad Hoc Group in particular has worked to develop practical cooperative solutions to address the humanitarian and protection needs of people travelling in irregular mixed flows.

Australia firmly believes that we must continue to complement law enforcement and security-related activities by addressing some of the issues that drive people to move into and within the region.

Australia remains committed to taking a comprehensive approach to combating people smuggling and to working together with countries in the region towards this aim.

Australia also remains committed to working in partnership with other governments, international organisations, and with civil society to prevent human trafficking, bring the perpetrators to justice, and protect and support victims.

To this end, I am pleased to reiterate the Australian Government's strongest support for the Bali Process.

Australia's Response to People Smuggling and Trafficking

The Australian Government has taken a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to combating human trafficking, which addresses the full trafficking cycle, from recruitment to reintegration. Australia's domestic response to human trafficking has provided support to victims and overseen a number of successful prosecutions and convictions.

Last year the Australian Government strengthened its anti-people smuggling legislation to create new offences targeting those involved in people smuggling ventures to Australia.

Considerable progress has also been made in information and intelligence sharing.

Australia also works with regional partners on a bilateral basis in relation to law enforcement cooperation and a range of capacity building projects to combat people smuggling activities.

Australia strongly appreciates the excellent cooperative arrangements we have with many countries in the region and the successes we have achieved together.

Regional Cooperation Framework

Co-Chairs, the Ad Hoc Group has identified that secondary movement is a particular challenge in the region with many asylum seekers moving irregularly in the hope of obtaining a permanent migration outcome.

This is a shared issue that requires a cooperative response. It is clear that no one country can provide the whole range of solutions required to resolve this regional challenge.

Unless we take collective action to build a regional approach to irregular migration, people smugglers will continue to decide who gets access to long-term protection and where it is provided.

The criminal syndicates that ply this trade will also continue to undermine the integrity of our borders and exploit vulnerable people.

An inclusive but non-binding regional cooperation framework, which senior officials have recommended ministers consider agreeing to today, would provide a more effective way for interested parties to cooperate to reduce irregular movement in the region.

Australia is committed to working with regional partners to enhance the region's response to irregular migration, improve consistency in the treatment of refugees and undermine the people smuggling trade.

Cooperation between source, transit and destination countries affected by people smuggling, as well as with international organisations such as UNHCR and IOM, will be important to the success of any regional response.

The framework which has been put forward for consideration would provide the umbrella under which participating states could pursue common objectives through practical arrangements at a bilateral or subregional level.

Such arrangements would operate on an opt-in basis – they would not require action from any States that did not wish to be involved in particular activities.

The framework would be underpinned by a set of core principles, as outlined in the Co-Chairs' Statements from the Senior Officials' Meetings earlier this month.

Interested States could enter into practical arrangements under the framework consistent with the principles and guided by overarching considerations.

Moving Forward

Co-Chairs, Australia believes that the development of a regional cooperation framework provides new opportunities to work together to effectively manage the challenges of irregular migration and the associated activities of people smugglers and human traffickers.

Australia is committed to contributing to activities that will assist in achieving practical solutions.

Australia supports reinvigorating Bali Process efforts to increase States' capacity to combat human trafficking. In support of this, Australia proposes to convene a meeting of regional technical experts to consider practical measures to protect and assist

victims, prosecute perpetrators of the crime, and prevent human trafficking.

In addition Australia strongly supports the importance of strengthened information and intelligence sharing. As a reflection of this, Australia proposes expanding the Regional Immigration Liaison Officer Network to include countries from the broader Bali Process. We also propose working with IOM and interested parties to redevelop the Bali Process website to more effectively share intelligence and information.

Australia supports the retention of the Ad Hoc Group as a forum for participating States to share experiences and knowledge flowing from arrangements implemented under the regional cooperation framework. While progressing arrangements the Ad Hoc Group might concurrently focus on ways to harmonise processes dealing with irregular flows in the region.

Australia is currently commissioning a research project to establish an information base relating to regional approaches to protection, resettlement and repatriation. This would assist in informing the implementation of the proposed framework.

Once the project is finalised, the Ad Hoc Group would be well-placed to examine the research findings through an appropriate officials' forum to identify strategies for achieving greater consistency in the region.

Australia will also explore the possibility of developing a standard regional approach to the management of irregular maritime ventures and looks forward to hosting a technical meeting to discuss this issue.

Australia will also continue to strongly support upcoming Bali Process initiatives including workshops on mutual legal assistance, immigration aspects of airport security and document examination.

Australia is also interested in exploring the possibility of working with Bali Process partners in relation to biometric capability for more consistent identification and registration of irregularly moving asylum seekers.

Co-chairs, I am confident that through the outcomes achieved today we can continue to make progress towards addressing the people smuggling and human trafficking issues of most concern to us as a region. In this regard, Australia strongly endorses the regional framework proposal recommended to ministers by our senior officials.

Thank you.