WORKSHOP OUTCOMES SUMMARY

The Bali Process Ad Hoc Group Visa Integrity Workshop was held in the Republic of the Maldives from 7 to 9 December 2010. The workshop was co- hosted by the Republic of the Maldives and Australia.

The workshop was attended by delegates, representing the governments of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Republic of Indonesia, Malaysia, Republic of the Maldives, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Kingdom of Thailand, Union of Myanmar, and Australia. Observers from the United Arab Emirates, Canada, IOM and UNHCR also attended.

The workshop was opened by the Maldives Minister for Home Affairs the Honourable Mr. Mohamed Shihab and Her Excellency Ms Kathy Klugman, Australian High Commissioner for Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

Objectives of the Workshop

The workshop agreed on the following objectives:

1. To discuss the importance of overall visa integrity, including conducting appropriate checks, and strengthening border security and bona fides checking at the border and at visa issuing points.

2. To exchange information and ideas on visa issuing processes in the region, including challenges faced and options for addressing these challenges.

3. To develop a regional understanding of the tools that can be used to prevent and detect irregular movements at the border.

4. To explore the potential for regional information sharing on visa integrity.

Scene Setting – Irregular Movements

Australia highlighted current trends in irregular movements impacting the broader Bali Process Ad hoc Group region. The briefing emphasised the activity of people smugglers and human traffickers and the potential for terrorist-related movements. The use of document fraud, particularly in primary documents to obtain passports was described.

Another feature of the current environment was the movement of Africans into the South East Asia region and often high levels of criminality associated with this group.

Country Presentations and Group Discussions

The country briefs by the participants provided an insight into visa regimes, visa integrity issues and challenges for the future. A common theme was the need to link visa operations with the competing priorities of security and the necessity to facilitate genuine business travellers and tourists for economic reasons.

Also highlighted was the disparity in some countries in the region between the technology and communications available to assist in visa integrity issues and identity checking at airports and other border crossings. This impediment was particularly important to those countries in the region who shared long land borders often remote from established communications networks and other infrastructure, including reliable electricity sources.

Common to all presentations was the need to identify threats to immigration borders that exploit visa regimes and the risk associated with people using bogus identities to acquire travel documents. Some of the briefings identified the requirement to have extensive security features built into visa labels and the operational procedures to process and issue visas.

International Organization for Migration (IOM) representative, an expert on visa systems, highlighted international standards in the development of security features and processes around the issuing of visa labels. The brief also addressed areas of vulnerability and suggested security features to mitigate risk. The vulnerability of 'wet stamps' was also discussed.

The country briefs also explored issues around visa on arrival processes. Discussion focussed on the limited ability to check supporting documentation and the bona fides of the person attempting to enter the country. Australia highlighted its universal approach to visas whereby all non-Australians had to apply for a visa prior to commencing their travel.

Smaller economies such as the Maldives are highly dependent on tourism and such visa regimes would probably impede the travel of genuine people seeking to enter the country. This emphasised the need for a careful balance between facilitating genuine travellers and risk mitigation strategies to detect and prevent irregular migration.

Break-out Group Discussions

Participants agreed to the following issues for break-out group sessions.

- Group A. How could you improve your visa issuing programs to ensure only genuine travellers are facilitated?

- Group B. What are the challenges we face in achieving balance between facilitation and border control?

Group A comprising Australia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Maldives, Myanmar, Thailand, IOM, UNHCR determined the following 10 issues that ad-hoc group members could consider to improve visa processes while ensuring genuine travellers were facilitated:

1. Enhance our knowledge of high risk travellers

2. Inform analytical processes around visa decisions with quality information and intelligence

3. Review/establish appropriate immigration laws and regulations to support visa regimes

4. Ensure final decision for entry is made at the 'border' on arrival

5. Ensure all the sources of information are exploited to better inform risk assessments

6. Improve the security of visa labels and security of issuing procedures (for example ICAO international visa label standards and self assessment issuing procedures)

7. Improve or develop appropriate movement and document alert databases

8. Develop or enhance training programs for visa issuing officers, regardless of agency

9. Develop proper relationships with other government agencies involved in border security (for example police/customs) to share information and intelligence and to introduce complementary regulations and procedures.

10. Invest in good supporting IT and other infrastructure

Group B comprising Australia, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and the United Arab Emirates explored the essential elements necessary to achieve an appropriate balance between facilitation and border control.

There are competing views about facilitation and it is often left to Immigration departments to determine policy settings which balance facilitation and control. There was general consensus that security must always outweigh facilitation, but recognising that the vast majority of travellers are genuine. The discussion also emphasised the economic benefits derived from these movements.

The group agreed that the key to balancing facilitation and control lies in the effective collection, collation and analysis of data to effectively identify threats and manage risks.

<u>**Summary**</u>

The workshop explored visa regimes amongst the ad-hoc group and provided an opportunity to discuss practices and future options to improve this primary aspect of immigration border control. The discussions centred upon the need for decisions on visa regulations to be informed by clear and detailed information and intelligence.

The discussions emphasised the importance of information and intelligence sharing between other agencies with border security responsibilities, regional partners and the international community.

Participants were briefed on current international standards for visa label developments and issuing procedures. Briefings emphasised the requirement for decisions on visa regimes to be based on sound information and intelligence regarding assessment and mitigation of threat and risk.

Determining threat and risk emerged as a main theme throughout the workshop. Discussions highlighted the need for managers of visa systems to be made aware of risks. Similarly officers issuing visas should be appropriately trained.

The briefing from UNHCR expressed the importance for the countries to have mechanisms to identify and assist people in need of international protection.

<u>Recommendations</u>

1. Countries should consider introducing improved training for immigration officer to analyse appropriate information and immigration-related intelligence to develop threat and risk assessments to inform visa regimes.

2. Opportunities to undertake further workshops on this subject should be explored, including the full Bali Process member countries.

3. Exchanges/visits by Bali Process Ad Hoc group members to other member economies to further pursue options which would enhance the visa regimes of less developed countries.

4. Countries should enhance their capability to access all necessary information to inform threat and risk assessments.

The Republic of the Maldives and Australia (workshop co-chairs)

Bali Process Ad Hoc Group Visa Integrity Workshop

The Maldives, 9 December 2010