

**Summary of remarks by Ambassador Pisan Manawapat,  
Ambassador of Thailand to the United States  
at the Panel Discussion on “Tackling Southeast Asia’s Refugee Crisis”  
June 17, 2015 at the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS)**

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1. Thailand appreciates the U.S. Government for its leadership role and pledge of support in surveillance at sea, funding and resettlement.
2. Despite not being party to the 1951 Refugees Convention and its 1967 Protocols, Thailand has hosted more than a million refugees and displaced persons from various conflicts for over 40 years: from Indochinese refugees to displaced persons from Myanmar, of which over **130,000 still remain** under our care even today

We are also playing host to some ten thousands so called Persons of Concern in urban settings: people with refugees claim pending status determination by the UNHCR.

Through all this, we continue to **firmly adhere to our humanitarian tradition.**

3. Our new challenge came in the form of **irregular maritime movement of migrants** from Rakhine State and Bangladesh.

The mixed migratory flow, compound with the elements of transnational crime, made this a tough nut to crack.

4. Profusion of **transnational criminal networks** is both cause and effect of irregular migration: smugglers benefit from this business model and, in turn, make their services more readily available, resulting in more irregular movement of persons.
5. The humanitarian crisis in the Indian Ocean earlier in May was the culmination of the problem of irregular migration that has long plagued our region.

**It demands immediate humanitarian response in addition to the medium and longer term solutions.**

That is why Thailand hosted the **Special Meeting** on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean on 29 May 2015.

The meeting brought together some of the most affected countries in the region, from countries of origin to transit to destination, as well as a number of concerned international partners and relevant international organizations.

It provided an invaluable venue for countries to reflect on their commitment and discuss possible cooperation.

A number of **practical and concrete proposals were put forward** by the participants: these include immediate measures to save lives at sea, innovative solutions to tackle migrant smuggling and prevent irregular migration, and renewed cooperation to address the root causes.

As an active member of **ASEAN and the Bali Process**, Thailand will push for effective implementation of these recommendations at both forums.

### Short-term solution

6. Thailand gives priority to **saving lives at sea**. On May 25, our Prime Minister ordered the launch of a **special taskforce** to oversee our humanitarian assistance to migrants stranded at sea (Operation Center for Patrol and Humanitarian Assistance to Irregular Migrants in the Indian Ocean - OCPHAM).

**Surveillance units** have been deployed by air and sea to monitor our maritime border, while **floating platforms** equipped with medical and other staff on board to provide necessary humanitarian assistance are in operation. Police officers are also on board to interview and gather evidence in order to prosecute human traffickers.

Since the deployment of navy vessels and air patrol to conduct search and rescue operation in Thai and adjacent international waters over 2 weeks ago, **no migrant boats have come up during our search**.

This is not unique to Thailand, other efforts by Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as US air surveillance with support from Malaysia and Thailand over the same period, also came up empty.

Myanmar and Bangladesh also joined in on the humanitarian efforts: the Bangladeshi navy was able to intercept a migrant boat leaving from Bangladesh's Cox' Bazar while the Myanmar navy rescued some 900 migrants off its coast in late May.

### Medium-term solution

7. Thailand has continued efforts to **crackdown on people smuggling and human trafficking syndicates**.

As of June 10, arrest warrants were issued for 89 persons, with 53 already arrested. More than 50 police officers were also transferred from the affected areas pending investigations. This includes an arrest warrant for a 3-star Army general on 13 charges relating to people smuggling and human trafficking. Thailand's Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO) also seized assets worth 109 million baht (around 3,300,000 USD) from this human trafficking network.

Thailand has also had close cooperation with the Government of Bangladesh in addressing this issue. Since 2013, over 830 illegal migrants have been verified as Bangladeshi nationals and have returned voluntarily with assistance from both Governments and, on occasions, IOM.

These are just some example of what have been done and what is possible.

We are exploring other venues of cooperation, including establishing a joint special investigation taskforce to disrupt smugglers' network – our biggest crackdown that began last month and resulted in over 59 arrests (including many local politicians and law enforcement officers) was a product of our close law enforcement cooperation with Malaysia.

### **Long-term solution**

8. Long-term and sustainable solution should be on **addressing root causes and improving livelihood in countries of origin.**

On our part, we have contributed some **300,000 USD for humanitarian assistance in Rakhine State** to the Government of Myanmar since 2012 to provide immediate relief and stabilize the area. We have also contributed to the livelihood of the two communities as part of Thailand's Agricultural Livelihood Development Project.

In addition, through close cooperation between our two Governments, Thailand has organized various activities with an aim to **support socio-economic development** in Rakhine State, including business matching program between Myanmar business owners in Rakhine and Thai businesses in Yangon, dispatching of mobile medical unit to Rakhine, and the invitation of Rakhine high-ranking officials to participate in our Emerging Leaders Program.

9. **Key messages from Thailand**

- Thailand is serious about tackling all types of irregular migration, whether it is human trafficking or people smuggling or a mix of both. But no country can tackle it alone. **International cooperation is indispensable.**
- The Bangkok meeting on 29 May was not meant to have answers to all problems. But the meeting helped kick start the process to

mobilize international cooperation to find solutions for the immediate, medium and long-terms. **We need to keep this momentum going forward.**

- When the spotlight shifts to other emergencies elsewhere, regional countries shouldering burdens should not be left to fend for themselves. **We need sustained international assistance and burden-sharing.**
- The short term objective of saving lives has been achieved and transnational criminal networks' back has been broken due to tough crackdown. **But we cannot be complacent.** Closer intelligence sharing, law enforcement cooperation and other preventive or deterrent measures need to be put in place.
- **For the long term, it is vital to work constructively with governments of the countries of origin to tackle root causes of the outflows.** We need to help these countries create an environment that is conducive for people to stay home instead of taking risky journeys.
- **The U.S. should regard Thailand as a strong partner and ally in the fight against human trafficking and people smuggling.** Thailand has played a central role on the issue and has good cooperation with countries in the region to address it.

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