

MEDIA ADVISORY

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Bali Process meeting: Human rights of refugees must be the priority

Spokespeople available for interview

The protection of refugees and migrants and policies that prioritize human rights must be top of the agenda at the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the Bali Process (March 22-23), Amnesty International said.

"The safety of refugees and migrants must be an absolute priority at this high level meeting of the Bali Process. In 2015 alone hundreds of people died taking dangerous and irregular maritime routes across South East Asian waters. Many of the people on the move in this region are fleeing persecution and it is appalling that they are risking further abuse or death in order to reach safety," said Champa Patel, Amnesty International's Interim Director for South East Asia and the Pacific.

"Last year's push-back of boats in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea illustrated the disastrous consequences of ignoring the plight of people who resorted to dangerous routes to escape serious threats to their lives. Governments have not lived up to their obligations to respect, promote and protect the rights of refugees and migrants."

The Bali Process is an international forum whose objectives are to facilitate discussion and information sharing about issues relating to people smuggling, human trafficking and related transnational crime. It is co-chaired by Australia and Indonesia.

In 2015 alone, the UN Refugee Agency estimated that at least 33,600 refugees and migrants travelled through South East Asia in mixed maritime movements. The refugee crisis that erupted in Southeast Asia in May last year saw thousands of people from Myanmar and Bangladesh stranded in rickety boats, pushed back from safety on shore, trafficked into forced labour, or killed at sea. The absence of legal frameworks in Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand has meant that those who do reach land safely have minimal protection and are frequently subject to arrests and detention.

"Regional cooperation is vital in addressing these matters and Member States must strengthen the ways they work together, including in developing effective search and rescue operations, and creating safe and legal pathways for refugees and migrants in order to avert further disasters at sea," said Champa Patel.

Amnesty International also stressed that without a change in the circumstances that lead to forced and irregular movement, the safety and protection of refugees and migrants cannot be guaranteed.

Effective regional cooperation requires meeting the temporary needs of refugees and asylum seekers, allocating responsibility, and finding solutions for people who are found to be in need of international protection.

For more information or to arrange an interview please contact:

Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or +44 (0) 777 847 2126 email: press@amnesty.org twitter: @amnestypress

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK