

Thailand has called on all countries concerned, be they countries of origin, transit, or destination, to work together in a spirit of friendship and find solutions to the problem of irregular maritime migration in this region.

In his opening remarks at the Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean at the Anantara Siam Bangkok Hotel in Bangkok on 29 May 2015, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister General Tanasak Patimapragorn pointed out that the influx of irregular migrants in the Indian Ocean has reached an alarming level.

He said that the situation has affected various countries in the region and that no country can solve this problem alone. "The problem of irregular migration is more complex than what we are seeing. More than ever, we need concerted efforts by all countries concerned, be they countries of origin, transit, or destination. It also requires both time and international cooperation to address the problem comprehensively in the spirit of international burden-sharing. We need to work together.

General Tanasak said, "Recognizing the urgent nature of the problem, Thailand took the initiative to host this Special Meeting with 3 main objectives: first, to address the immediate humanitarian situation of stranded migrants; second, to combat the long-term problem of people smuggling and human trafficking to prevent further irregular movements; and, third, to address the root causes from origin.

He told the meeting that Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand recently met in Putrajaya, Malaysia, to discuss these urgent matters. They announced their intention to continue to provide humanitarian assistance to those migrants still at sea. Malaysia and Indonesia also offered temporary shelter for the stranded migrants provided that the resettlement and repatriation process will be done in one year by the international community.

General Tanasak said, "On our part, Thailand remains ready as always to provide humanitarian assistance to these migrants by tripling our efforts. On 25 May, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha ordered the launch of an integrated special taskforce and a humanitarian mission to provide assistance to migrants stranded at sea.

Since 26 May, the Royal Thai Navy vessels have been deployed to serve as floating platforms to provide humanitarian assistance to those migrants at sea. Personnel on these floating vessels consists of the followings: First a medical team to provide treatment, food and water; Second an investigation team to investigate the possibility of human trafficking activities; Third a registration team to identify and prepare for possible solutions, including referrals to shelters offered by Indonesia and Malaysia. If disembarkation is absolutely necessary, the migrants will be treated first and foremost according to humanitarian principles under Thai laws.

Thailand has also deployed air patrols by the Royal Thai Navy and the Royal Thai Air Force to monitor movements over Thai waters, adjacent area, and international waters within its capability to assist and support the humanitarian mission.

"We welcome other interested countries to join in, under Thailand's coordination. In this juncture, I have asked my Ministry to set up a coordinating center, working with IOM, to facilitate countries or organizations wishing to join in our humanitarian undertaking, General Tanasak said.

"Thailand remains ever committed to our humanitarian tradition of hosting refugees and displaced persons since the 1970s. Even now some 130,000 still remain under our care. At present, we are also hosting many other groups, including some 600 irregular maritime migrants.

"This current crisis highlights the sad reality that people are still compelled to leave their homes and loved ones, due to diverse causes. Irregular migration has become increasingly complex and demands comprehensive solutions. We must not solve one problem just to find out later that it has in fact created another. While we are trying to help those in need, we must seek to stop the outflow of irregular migration and combat transnational crime and destroy their networks. The root causes that motivated these people to leave must also be addressed.