



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Regional Centre for
East Asia and the Pacific

**2nd Inter-regional Workshop on Improving Evidence-Based
Knowledge on Migrant Smuggling from, through,
within and to South-East and East Asia**

“Joining Forces to Stem a Deadly Business”

Bangkok, 20 to 21 October 2011

Opening Remarks by Gary Lewis

Regional Representative

20 October 2011

Welcome

Good morning, and thank you all for coming today. Today, I am pleased to see here so many colleagues and partners from Thailand, the Asia-Pacific region and around the world.

From Bangkok, I welcome our friends from the Royal Thai Police (Immigration Bureau), the Australian Federal Police and DIAC, the Belgium Federal Police Liaison, and Canada’s CBSA and RCMP.

It’s a pleasure to see law enforcement representatives from so many countries and agencies in the Asia-Pacific region: Cambodia (Immigration Department and Anti-Trafficking in Persons Department); China (Border Control Department); Indonesia (INP and Imigrasi); Lao PDR (Immigration Department); Malaysia (Immigration Department); the Maldives (Immigration Department); Pakistan (FIA); the Philippines (National Police); Pacific Immigration Directors’ Conference (PIDC); Sri Lanka (Immigration Department); Viet Nam (Immigration Department); United Kingdom Border Agency (based in China).

I also note and welcome our colleague Rebecca Miller, UNODC consultant for the SoM chapter in our upcoming regional TOCTA, which is due out in Q1 2012.

From other regions, we have representatives from Europol (The Hague, Netherlands); France (Border Police); Frontex (Warsaw); Germany (BKA); INTERPOL; Matthias Neseck (former UNODC consultant – financial transactions within migrant smuggling, Germany), and UNODC colleagues from ITS and Statistics and Surveys Section (Vienna).

All in all, including UNODC facilitators and excluding myself, this makes for 32 participants.

This is inspiring, and makes this a truly inter-regional meeting. Welcome to you all.

Flooding in Thailand

I thank you all for making the effort to come to this meeting in what must have involved some difficulty for you.

This is doubly inspiring, given the sad, ongoing flooding which is currently affecting millions of Thais and residents of our host country.

Thailand, as you know, has been hit by severe floods. Large parts of Central and North-East Thailand are under water. Several hundred people have lost their lives. Millions more are affected. Yet, there is strong spirit of solidarity and community action in response to this tremendous challenge.

On behalf of UNODC and the international community, I express my deepest sympathy to the Thai people and offer our respect and support to the Thai authorities for the work they've done and continue to do in response to these severe floods.

I hasten to add that Thailand is not alone in being affected. Our thoughts and support go out also to all the other countries in our region seriously affected by heavy monsoonal rains: Cambodia, Viet Nam, Lao PDR and Philippines.

I offer my deepest sympathy and support to the governments and peoples of these countries also.

Purpose of the meeting

The purpose of our inter-regional workshop is threefold:

- to get your expert advice on our current work, we are undertaking in establishing a “Voluntary Reporting System on Migrant Smuggling and related Conduct”
- to exchange information on current migrant smuggling trends; and

- to network and to create a network.

Thus, 'Improving knowledge' or as we call it in our very technical language 'improving evidence-based knowledge' on migrant smuggling is at the heart of our meeting.

Three priorities in fighting SoM

As it is true for many forms of crime, so it is true for migrant smuggling: the need of the hour is knowing the threat better, acting operationally, cooperating regionally:

- First, we must know the threat better. For this, we need to improve the quality of the information we have – and share it among ourselves better.
- Second, we need to sharpen our technical capacity to act operationally. By this I mean that we need to develop better techniques. Techniques which can match up to the knowledge and prowess which our adversaries possess. Here the emphasis must be on improving international investigative, policing, and prosecutorial tools.
- Thirdly, we need to cooperate better across a region and across regions.

Comparison with SoM networks

Let's compare ourselves with the migrant smuggling networks:

- Migrant smuggling networks are structured horizontally, operate in flexible way while closely interacting with each other.
 - There is no single "master-mind". Often, many criminals are involved in one smuggling operation. Cooperating with each other, driven by the prospects of profit.
 - They act like small entrepreneurs forming changing business coalition, out-sourcing or "buying-in" services from local criminals along the smuggling routes.
- Ourselves: Our actions are still too often limited by what I call the "silo" mentality. Too much vertical, blinkered thinking and acting. This results in poor information sharing and lack of true cooperation.
- For migrant smugglers borders are irrelevant. In fact, making them irrelevant is their core expertise.
- Ourselves: We tend to focus on "formal" sovereignty, and, in the process often we often sacrifice "effective" sovereignty.

- Migrant smugglers are incredibly well funded. Those, who organize and profit from migrant smuggling, face still limited risks of detection and punishment: it's a high-profit-low risk crime.
- Ourselves: Our operations are often underfunded. Yet, better information sharing and cooperation could certainly contribute to maximizing the impact of the limited resources we have at our hands.

We need to reverse these imbalances.

Information sharing and cooperation are the keys to this.

Bali Process and UNODC

Here in this region, we have the Bali Process.

The Bali Process is an inter-governmental forum to address the challenges of migrant smuggling and human trafficking. The Bali Process covers most of the countries which are in West, South, South-East and East Asia, in the Pacific including Australia and New Zealand, and also – since most recently – the United States.

Ministers and senior officials from these states have pointed out - at many occasions - the need to enhance sharing of information and cooperation in response to migrant smuggling.

They also did so at the latest Ministerial Meeting which took place in Bali this March. Let me quote: ***“Ministers agreed to strengthen engagement on information and intelligence sharing underscoring the high value and utility that would derive from enhanced information sharing. In this regard, Ministers welcomed assistance from UNODC in establishing a voluntary reporting system on migrant smuggling and related conduct in support of the Bali Process”***. – end of quote.

Since then, we – UNODC – have been working hard on advancing the establishment of this “voluntary reporting system on migrant smuggling and related conduct”, and this very meeting today and tomorrow, will certainly mark a milestone in getting this system up and running.

We are not seeking your “political endorsement”. This has been obtained at the latest Ministerial Meeting.

We are looking for your expert advice – your advice from the perspective of a law enforcement practitioner – in order to assist us in finalizing this voluntary reporting system, to design it in such a way that it will become of useful tool in helping us to better understand and respond to migrant smuggling.

Information sharing is difficult, but achievable

I know sharing information on migrant smuggling is a nothing that can be achieved easily. Already sharing information among law enforcement agencies within a country often does not work well. And I also know that the subject of migrant smuggling is fraught with political sensitiveness. Yet, I also know that we managed to overcome such challenges in other fields that very fraught with political sensitiveness.

14 years ago – at a time when I was working in Pakistan – I recall UNODC launching its very first *World Drug Report*. Putting this together at that time was tremendous challenge. The data set was weak and the report – being a first of its kind – came in for a lot of criticism. Since then, we have published each year a *World Drug Report*. We also instituted drug reports on specific issues and covering specific countries and regions. And we are now, many years later, in a position to provide policy recommendations based on solid evidence of the extent and nature of the world's drug problem.

We would like to think that something similar can be done with regard to Migrant Smuggling.

Concluding

Let me quote one more time before concluding:

In September 2010, state representatives from the Asian and the Pacific region adopted the so-called “Bangkok Statement on Migration and Development”.

In this statement they underscored that: **“...migrant smugglers take advantage of people's vulnerability, particularly those who may be desperate to migrate in an attempt to establish a better life or flee persecution. At destination, smuggled migrants' status as irregular immigrants makes them vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and human trafficking...”** end of quote.

Migrant smuggling is not a victimless crime. It is not a service industry. It is a criminal business motivated by profits. Smuggled migrants face many risks during their journey and as a result of it. Often, smugglers put their clients' lives at risk. I am sure we all know of numerous incidents where migrants have suffocated, dehydrated, drowned, got burnt to death by the engine of a vehicle.

Migrant smuggling is ultimately a deadly business. And we need to joint forces to better respond to it.

I count on your support towards this end.

Thank you for your attention.