

**INTERPOL Specialists Group on Crimes against Children
1st Southeast Asia Working Party Meeting
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Opening Speech

by
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Honourable Pol.Gen. Chatchawal Suksomjit, Director of Children and Women Family Protection and Anti-Human Trafficking Center, Royal Thai Police

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Mr. Michael Moran, Assistant Director, Sub-Directorate on Trafficking in Human Beings, INTERPOL - IPSG

Distinguished Experts, Consultants from Australia, Norway, UNODC, and World Vision

Distinguished Delegations from ASEAN Member States

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to represent the ASEAN Secretariat at this important gathering of law enforcement agencies from the Project Childhood, partner agencies, international organisations, and from the ASEAN Member States. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Interpol for kindly extending the invitation to us as well as for the excellent arrangements and warm hospitality accorded to all delegations.

In retrospect, it was in Bangkok in January 2010 that Project Childhood was augmented – the project with an objective of preventing and adequately tackling child trafficking and sexual exploitation of children from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Viet Nam and Thailand was proposed to and concurred by those countries. It was a timely initiative and much needed reinforcement for the law enforcement agencies of concerned project beneficiary countries.

Human Trafficking is increasingly becoming the second most prevalent crime in the world, surpassed only by drugs trafficking, and this global crime generates billions of dollars in profits.

In ASEAN, the vulnerable, i.e., women and children, especially from the Mekong sub-region, are being preyed upon and lured into the clutches of organized criminal groups. Sexual exploitation and trafficking of children, especially girls, has also increased in Mekong Sub-region, according to the UNODC Trafficking Global Report that was released in February this year.

In ASEAN, I am proud to share that a law enforcement network called Heads of Specialist (for anti- trafficking) Unit or HSU as it is known, has been established to foster closer collaboration amongst the practitioners; and to conduct cross border investigation and information sharing. The HSU is the operational arm of the ASEAN- SOMTC Working Group on Trafficking in Persons through which ASEAN's regional goals in combating trafficking in persons are being realized.

Although progress has been made in the fight against trafficking in persons with almost all ASEAN Member States have enacted domestic laws criminalizing trafficking in persons as a criminal offence, progress in getting conviction for offenders of trafficking in particular those of sexual exploitation and trafficking of children is still limited.

The challenges in this regard include, *inter alia*, the legal rights of the offenders are overprotected, and that weak evidence and witness often impeded the adjudication process of many child trafficking/ sexual exploitation cases. In addition, not many countries have juvenile courts established.

This scenario highlights the fact that tackling trafficking and sexual exploitation of children requires a concerted effort and a strong response founded on rigorous criminal justice system, sound immigration policy, cross-border and regional collaboration, and most importantly intelligence sharing on the offenders and criminal networks.

Today's event showcases the regional cooperation in response to common threat and concern. I am encouraged by the presence of ASEAN Member States, partner agencies, Interpol and the UNODC gathered here. I believe in the course of this meeting, all of us will benefit from information, experiences, and good practices imparted by practitioners and experts from the region and beyond.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

ASEAN is only three years away from its target of establishing an ASEAN Community by the end of 2015. Although many of the targets on integration can be met in time, for some, like regional peace and security, we need to be pragmatic and be aware of the challenges that exist and which will continue to persist in the future. As ASEAN's endeavours towards regional integration accelerate, some negative impacts such as transnational crime are inevitable.

Needless to say , ASEAN criminal justice agencies have the eminent and ultimate responsibility to protect the wellbeing and personal safety of more than 600 million people of ASEAN- especially women and children. Only through your relentless efforts and vigilance against criminal offenders, our children of ASEAN can be safe and our future- the future of ASEAN- will be safe.

As boundaries diffuse in this ever-shrinking world, unity becomes even more necessary. Only when we unite in spirit, can we truly cope with the challenges we face.

In the spirit of ASEAN solidarity, let me conclude by wishing you all every success and fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.
