Combating Human Trafficking in ASEAN

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On January 1, 2016, the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) became a formal community, increasing the already expansive trans-border flows of goods, services and people. The integration will likely create economic opportunities, but it also focuses attention on social concerns such as migration and transnational crimes. It is estimated that 1.6 million people per year are trafficked within ASEAN, yet only about 3,000 of those trafficked are properly identified as trafficking-in-persons (TIP) "survivors" – those who have received support and been safely repatriated.

National-level human trafficking legislation varies throughout the region and since human trafficking is a cross-border issue, consistent enforcement is a challenge that leaves victims unrecognized or treated as illegal immigrants or criminals. Even when successfully repatriated, survivors are vulnerable to re-trafficking due to improper or non-existent support systems through which to reintegrate them into society. Identification and treatment of victims is among the challenges the recently adopted ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP) intends to address by harmonizing approaches for better coordination within the region.

While there are often procedures in place to deal with victims of violence in ASEAN countries, most have not yet established procedures to address the particular needs of TIP victims. To date, attention has focused on developing a strong legal framework and criminal justice responses, leaving the practical challenges of meeting TIP victims' needs largely unaddressed. As a result, even those properly identified as survivors do not receive appropriate care.

The U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. Department of State through the ASEAN-U.S. Partnership for Good Governance, Equitable and Sustainable Development and Security (PROGRESS) project, is supporting ASEAN's efforts to address the needs of TIP victims through the following:

- **Building consensus** – Providing support for a series of consultations with ASEAN entities and other stakeholders to come to consensus on regional guidelines and procedures to address the needs of TIP victims.
- **Providing technical assistance** – Sharing with relevant ASEAN entities the latest approaches from within ASEAN member states and globally to increase broader understanding and best practices for addressing the needs of TIP victims.
- **Tapping technology** – Exploring innovative ways to identify and assist victims, linking victims with law enforcement and seeking partnership opportunities with the private sector and social support agencies.
- **Supporting implementation at the national level** – Future initiatives seek to identify and support efforts to work with individual ASEAN member states to help implement shared ASEAN standards as embodied in the ACTIP.

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