

Summary Report
Regional Dialogue on the Nexus between Transnational Crime and Human Rights:
Exploring Consular Assistance for Victims of Trafficking and Forced Criminality from Scam
Compounds in ASEAN
13 – 14 May 2026

Opening Remarks

1. **H.E. Asst. Prof. Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang**, the Representative of Thailand to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), officially welcomed participants by framing the modern city as a contradictory space where technological innovation and extreme human rights violations coexist. He identified scam compounds as a new “front line” of regional inequality, where the victims’ right to movement, safety, and dignity are systematically stripped away. Dr. Bhanubhatra argued that the real test of ASEAN’s human rights framework is no longer found in diplomatic halls but in the daily realities of those trapped in forced labour.
2. He noted that the transition from individual scams to organised criminal ecosystems has created a protection gap that individual states struggle to fill. His remarks emphasised that this dialogue serves as a bridge to ensure regional commitments are reflected in municipal actions. He lauded the collaborative spirit of the event, aiming to translate abstract legal concepts into concrete protections for the vulnerable. The Representative concluded by urging a shift toward a victim-centred approach that prioritises rescue and rehabilitation over the criminalisation of coerced individuals.
3. **Ms. Michiko Ito**, Chief of Mission ad interim for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), provided a sobering look at the scale of exploitation, noting that traffickers have moved their operations into highly sophisticated digital arenas. She explained that the use of platforms like Telegram and WhatsApp to lure educated youth has fundamentally changed the profile of a typical trafficking victim. These individuals are often held in high-security compounds under the threat of physical abuse and debt bondage.
4. She highlighted that IOM’s data from 2022 to 2025 shows a disturbing trend where mixed migration flows are being diverted into forced criminality. Ms. Ito stressed that the identification of these victims is an evolving challenge that requires authorities to look beyond visible scars to the “invisible” means of control. She expressed her commitment to supporting ASEAN member states in refining their screening processes to ensure no victim is left behind or mistakenly prosecuted.
5. **Ms. Carla Silbert**, representing the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), discussed the persistent challenge of modern slavery in the region and the need for rigorous corporate and state accountability. She argued that the non-punishment principle is a cornerstone of human rights that must be upheld in every trafficking case. Her remarks pointed toward the necessity of bridging the communication gap between national law enforcement and human rights bodies.
6. **Mr. Andrew Egan**, Minister and Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of Australia in Thailand, highlighted the economic impact of these crimes, citing that nearly one million scam encounters occur daily in the region. He called for a modern coordination structure, using international agencies such as the FBI and the AFP to track the complex financial flows that sustain

these compounds. He concluded by asserting that human security and economic prosperity are interdependent, necessitating a proactive and united regional response.

Officiating Remarks

7. **H.E. Mr. Sarun Charoensuwan**, Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand, delivered the officiating remarks on behalf of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, **H.E. Mr. Sihasak Phuanketkeow**. He extended a warm welcome to H.E. Asst. Prof. Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang, the Representative of Thailand to AICHR, as well as to distinguished guests, including Ms. Michiko Itto, Ms. Carla Silbert, Mr. Andrew Egan, and all participating AICHR members. The Vice Minister highlighted that the dialogue builds upon the momentum of recent regional initiatives, including the European Union and Thailand seminar promoting rules-based collaboration to combat online scams. He emphasised that Southeast Asia is currently at a pivotal moment, facing a transnational crime network that has expanded into a complex ecosystem involving forced criminality, human trafficking, money laundering, and corruption. The scale of this crisis is alarming, with recent estimates indicating that cyber scam syndicates generated approximately one trillion dollars in 2024, coercing individuals from dozens of countries into a highly organised criminal system.
8. Recognising the severe humanitarian impact, **H.E. Mr. Sarun** reminded the participants that behind these staggering financial statistics are real human lives being exploited and forced into criminality against their will. He asserted that human rights and transnational crime can no longer be viewed in separate domains, as these illicit activities fundamentally undermine human dignity and erode the stability of regional institutions. As a country situated in the heartland of Southeast Asia, Thailand has witnessed the devastating cross-border impacts of these operations firsthand. In response, Thailand has taken significant leadership at the international level, being one of the seventy-two states to sign the relevant convention in Hanoi last year and co-hosting the Global Partnership Against Online Scam conference alongside the UNODC in Bangkok last December. Through these initiatives and dedicated frontline humanitarian efforts, Thailand has successfully facilitated the safe repatriation of almost eighteen thousand victims originating from forty-four different countries, highlighting the urgent necessity for a coordinated global response.
9. Concluding his remarks, **H.E. Mr. Sarun** stressed that diplomatic missions and consular offices now operate on the frontline of humanitarian assistance, facing challenges that no single country can address alone. He called for closer international coordination and deeper cooperation among all stakeholders, including governments, civil society, and the private sector, to effectively dismantle these networks. ASEAN currently stands at an important juncture and must actively strengthen its regional mechanisms while leveraging technology responsibly to combat cyber-enabled crimes. His Excellency reiterated that every regional response must remain firmly anchored in the protection of human dignity. He expressed his confidence that the dialogue would provide a vital platform for stakeholders to share insights and generate practical, victim-centred, and rights-based solutions, contributing meaningfully to the eradication of forced criminality and the protection of vulnerable populations across the region.

Keynote Address: “Understanding Scam Compounds in Southeast Asia: Regional Landscape and Ecosystem of Harm”

10. **Mr. Jason G. Tower**, representing the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, delivered a comprehensive keynote on the regional landscape of scam compounds, emphasising the severe urgency of the crisis. He began by contextualising the ongoing harm, noting that during the dialogue alone, millions of dollars would be stolen globally while tens of thousands of fraudulent recruitment posts lured vulnerable individuals into forced criminality, subjecting them to severe exploitation and inhumane torture. Tracing the historical roots of this ecosystem, he explained that the crisis originated roughly two decades ago when criminal syndicates relocated illicit online gambling operations from North Asia to Southeast Asia. Seeking security umbrellas to evade Chinese law enforcement, these actors took control of territories such as the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone around 2010. By 2017, these offshore operations had scaled to involve over one hundred thousand individuals, paving the way for sophisticated money laundering networks and the adoption of cutting-edge cryptocurrency technologies that seamlessly circumvent border controls and facilitate massive illicit capital flows.
11. The global pandemic in 2020 acted as a major catalyst for the industrialisation of this illicit economy, fundamentally shifting the business model toward human trafficking. As hundreds of thousands of workers were recalled to China, syndicates adapted by incorporating forced labour to sustain their operations, simultaneously expanding their targets beyond the Chinese-speaking world to include victims globally. **Mr. Jason G. Tower** detailed the grim reality inside these highly securitised scam cities, which operate with complete supply chains featuring dormitories, cafeterias, and illicit entertainment facilities situated alongside rooms designed for cruel punishment. The operators utilise deep psychological manipulation, trapping victims through fraudulent job offers, hostage taking, and debt bondage. Furthermore, the barrier to entry for new criminal operators remains exceptionally low compared to the lucrative profits, as syndicates actively sell prepackaged scamming materials and social media accounts to execute sophisticated frauds like the pig butchering scam, efficiently stripping victims of their entire life savings.
12. Addressing the systemic embeddedness of these networks, the speaker highlighted how criminal apex groups have successfully co-opted local political elites and established vast networks of front companies across Southeast Asia. These entities systematically launder billions of dollars of illicit wealth into legitimate regional economies, purchasing real estate, luxury goods, and corporate conglomerates. Although international law enforcement has begun to respond, exemplified by the October 2025 joint sanctions and United States indictments against a major transnational network, regional crackdowns have largely been uncoordinated and piecemeal. Between October 2025 and February 2026, campaign-style disruptions in Myanmar resulted in high losses of life and massive victim displacement but ultimately failed to hold the top criminal actors accountable. Instead, syndicates rapidly adapted by rescaling operations, moving deeper into clandestine jungle locations just kilometres from national borders, or relocating their operations entirely to new international jurisdictions such as Colombo.
13. Concluding his address, **Mr. Jason G. Tower** emphasised the critical need for a paradigm shift in how ASEAN and the international community confront this rapidly mutating threat. He argued that the current trajectory of localised law enforcement raids is insufficient against syndicates capable of such rapid geographical and operational adaptation. Instead, he called for robust, continuous regional cooperation focused on deep intelligence gathering and the systematic disruption of the

technological enablers of the crime, specifically targeting the social media platforms used for recruitment and the cryptocurrency exchanges facilitating illicit financial operations. By bringing together the human rights and law enforcement sectors to forge dynamic, rights-based solutions, he expressed optimism that governments and civil society can effectively dismantle these complex criminal ecosystems and provide genuine protection for the growing number of victims worldwide.

Session 1: Transnational Organised Crime and Human Rights Nexus in the Context of Scam Compounds in Southeast Asia

14. **H.E. Asst. Prof. Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang**, Representative of Thailand to AICHR, opened the session by emphasising the critical need to firmly establish the actual nexus between transnational organised crime and human rights. He noted that to take any meaningful action, stakeholders must first understand the precise linkage and the broader landscape where these two domains intersect. Rather than treating law enforcement and human rights as separate spheres, it is essential to map the entire ecosystem of harm that has emerged, particularly how criminal syndicates operate across regional borders and beyond to exploit vulnerabilities.
15. The moderator stressed that the primary objective of the session was to dissect this borderless ecosystem and identify the exact points where human rights violations occur. By comprehensively understanding the operational mechanics of scam compounds and the transnational networks that sustain them, policymakers and responders can develop more effective and targeted interventions. He set the stage for the panellists to explore the socioeconomic, geographical, and technological dimensions that currently blur the lines between territorial sovereignty and human rights protections in Southeast Asia.
16. **Dr. Khathaleeya Liamdee**, Lecturer at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Chulalongkorn University, provided an anthropological perspective on the profound transformation of borderlands in the region. She observed that areas historically reliant on local cross-border trade after the Cold War have devolved into remote zone nightmares dominated by industrial-scale scam compounds. This geographical reality has shifted border conflicts from traditional territorial disputes to complex struggles over illicit economic interests. Consequently, a state of fragmented authority has emerged where central governments hold power on paper, but local military actors or shadow governments exercise actual control, establishing their own rules and rendering formal diplomatic channels largely ineffective.
17. Furthermore, **Dr. Khathaleeya Liamdee** highlighted the bureaucratic friction and structural bias that compound the trauma of survivors. When victims manage to escape and reach local police stations, rigid paperwork protocols and a lack of nuanced screening often lead authorities to treat them as illegal migrant workers rather than trafficking victims, resulting in immediate detention, deportation, or even re-trafficking. She argued that the crisis cannot be reduced to a mere law enforcement issue, as it is deeply rooted in the socioeconomic collapse of traditional livelihoods and the asymmetry of globalisation. To truly comprehend this hyperconnected illicit economy, she called for deep research that amplifies the voices of survivors and local communities, urging an evolution of the current human rights framework to address these complex push factors.

18. **Ms. Rebecca Miller**, Regional Coordinator for Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling at the UNODC, underscored that human rights are fundamental to all transnational law enforcement cooperation. She detailed how the proliferation of industrial scale scam compounds is fundamentally outpacing the containment capacity of local governments. Criminal syndicates have capitalised on regulatory gaps, digital infrastructure, and the initial development of Special Economic Zones and casinos to rapidly expand their illicit operations. This has resulted in a massive spillover effect extending far beyond Southeast Asia, with authorities in Pacific Island nations like Palau discovering clandestine enterprises operating out of hotel resorts with hundreds of foreign nationals, while South Asia is increasingly targeted both as a new operational base and a source for trafficked persons.
19. In addressing the shifting business models of these syndicates, **Ms. Rebecca Miller** noted the emergence of sophisticated illicit markets controlled via encrypted platforms like Telegram. She highlighted a critical gap in the current law enforcement response, observing that while task forces collaborating with the Royal Thai Police to freeze assets have made progress, efforts largely result in the prosecution of low-level actors rather than the high-level organisers. She stressed that effective screening, victim identification, and protection remain severely lacking, especially for those who initially migrated voluntarily but were subsequently coerced into criminality. Advocating for a robust human rights approach, she announced a regional awareness campaign launched in 2025 across eight languages, aiming to scale up prevention and protect vulnerable populations from financial fraud and human trafficking.
20. **Ms. Xue Yin Peh** from Chainalysis illuminated the massive financial scale and professionalisation of the scam compound ecosystem through the lens of blockchain and cryptocurrency activity. She revealed that in 2025 alone, an estimated fourteen billion dollars were lost globally to cryptocurrency scams, with the average individual scam payment hovering around two thousand seven hundred dollars. This staggering financial volume underscores the industrialisation of scams, which operates through a highly specialised transnational supply chain supported by a myriad of third-party vendors providing deepfake software, fraudulent website development, Starlink internet connectivity, and recruitment services. By analysing blockchain data, Chainalysis identified that the illicit facilitators driving these networks account for twenty percent of all known illicit cryptocurrency activities, processing an average of forty-four million dollars a day.
21. Demonstrating the laundering process, **Ms. Xue Yin Peh** shared a tracing case study involving the Prince Group and the Byex cryptocurrency platform. Illicit funds were tracked flowing into Byex and subsequently through various unlicensed payment processors designed specifically to whitewash the money before integrating it into the mainstream global financial system as fiat currency. Despite the sophistication of these self-service laundering tools, she emphasised that blockchain technology serves as a permanent and verifiable public ledger accessible to agencies across jurisdictions. She concluded that tracing these complex financial flows requires unprecedented, coordinated action, as no single organisation can map this ecosystem independently, urging international partners to share intelligence to dismantle the financial infrastructure that sustains these criminal conglomerates.

22. **Ms. Peppi Tuulikki Kiviniemi Siddiq**, Senior Regional Migrant Protection and Assistance Specialist at the International Organization for Migration Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, issued a strong call to action, noting that a conservative estimate places at least half a million people inside regional scam compounds. She emphasised that the crisis operates on a sliding scale from labour trafficking to forced criminality, which cannot be accurately quantified without rigorous and proactive screening. To illustrate the severe human cost, she shared the story of James, a Ugandan computer science graduate working in Dubai who was lured by a lucrative job offer, flown to Thailand, and immediately trafficked into a Golden Triangle scam compound where his passport was confiscated and he was subjected to severe physical and psychological torture.
23. Even after James managed to contact authorities, jurisdictional complexities and a lack of localised enforcement left him trapped in a makeshift detention facility before the International Organization for Migration could facilitate his repatriation. **Ms. Peppi Tuulikki Kiviniemi Siddiq** pointed out that his subsequent struggle with psychological trauma and unemployment highlights the cyclical nature of exploitation driven by limited decent work options and economic pressures at home. She criticised the operational vacuums created during mass law enforcement crackdowns, where frontline actors often lack the capacity to conduct proper individual screenings, resulting in victims being processed without adequate humanitarian support. Moving forward, she advocated for standardised victim screening data, enhanced training for frontline responders to understand agency under duress, and harmonised intelligence sharing across borders to ensure a truly victim-centred regional response.
24. **During the Open Forum**, a dynamic discussion emerged regarding the conspicuous nature of scam operations, sparked by a question on why criminal syndicates eagerly display visible branding and signage on their compound buildings despite the illicit nature of their activities. **Ms. Rebecca Miller** explained that this is a calculated tactic for business legitimisation, noting that by establishing front companies equipped with formal human resources and sales departments, the syndicates project an aura of corporate legitimacy to both local authorities and potential recruits. **H.E. Asst. Prof. Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang** corroborated this by sharing observations from Central Asian colleagues, noting that from the outside, these heavily guarded compounds deceptively resemble normal and functioning corporate office parks.
25. Expanding on this concept, **Dr. Khathaleeya Liamdee** argued that within borderland regions, the illicit economy functions as the primary economic engine, and such public branding normalises informal and criminal activities within the local societal fabric. Furthermore, a participant offered a psychological profile of the perpetrators, describing them as highly egotistical criminals who operate with a sense of invulnerability. The participant drew a parallel to the Yakuza in Japan, noting that these syndicates boldly establish official headquarters because they view themselves as legitimate entrepreneurs seeking dominance, relying on their immense wealth and localised corruption to insulate themselves from any meaningful legal consequences.

Session 2: Victim Identification in Forced Criminality

26. **Mr. Jacinto Amaral**, Assistant to the Representative of Timor-Leste to AICHR, opened the session by welcoming attendees to a critical discussion on victim identification within the context of forced criminality. He outlined that the session would deeply explore how victims are exploited

in regional scam compounds and emphasise the necessity of a rights-based approach. He stressed the importance of applying the non-punishment principle, ensuring that individuals coerced into illicit acts are protected rather than penalised. By bringing together diverse perspectives on international migration governance, the panel aimed to address the technical processes of assessing the acts, means, and purposes of trafficking situations without a presumption of guilt or consent, even when criminal involvement is present.

27. To effectively lead and strengthen the regional framework, **Mr. Jacinto Amaral** highlighted the necessity of ASEAN partnerships. He specifically pointed to the operationalisation of Article 14 of the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, which serves to trigger a state's duty to protect potential victims. He set the stage for the speakers to share their frontline experiences, urging participants to reconsider traditional law enforcement metrics and focus on holistic, victim-centred methodologies that can bridge the gap between identifying trafficking indicators and providing immediate, life-saving consular assistance.
28. **Ms. Among Resi**, Head of the Protection and Border Governance Unit at IOM Thailand, shared insights from supporting member states in the screening and identification process. She clarified that while the International Organization for Migration does not engage directly in law enforcement or investigation, it acts as a vital support system utilising the Palermo Protocol and UNODC guidance on forced criminality. Between 2022 and 2025, her unit collaborated with the Royal Thai Government to screen and identify approximately eight hundred trafficking cases involving forty-six different nationalities. She explained that identifying victims requires a deep understanding of the acts, means, and purposes of recruitment, focusing on typical control mechanisms such as restrictive communication, document confiscation, debt bondage, and physical abuse, which she noted is currently more prevalent than traditional trafficking indicators.
29. Identifying structural and behavioural challenges, **Ms. Among Resi** pointed out that massive operational constraints prevent single countries from conducting full case management. Victims are frequently identified during high-pressure law enforcement raids where the focus is on the actual offenses rather than invisible trafficking indicators, complicated further by severe language and cultural barriers requiring qualified interpreters. Behaviourally, victims often exhibit fear and distrust toward officers and may refuse to identify themselves as victims due to stigma and systemic assumptions regarding their prolonged presence in scam centres. To overcome these hurdles, she recommended adopting a trauma-informed approach that assesses indicators holistically without a presumption of guilt, recognising firmly that criminal involvement does not exclude victimhood.
30. **Mr. Winnie Quidato**, Former Director of the Presidential Anti Organized Crime Commission of the Philippines, provided a stark law enforcement perspective on the immense weight of making rapid decisions under pressure with imperfect information. He asked the audience to visualise a modern target, typically an educated young man lured to Southeast Asia by generous online job postings, only to have his passport confiscated and be forced into scamming under the threat of violence. In the eyes of the law, this individual appears as a criminal, but in the eyes of conscience, he is enslaved. He introduced the critical concept of the gate, representing the threshold between the compound where a victim is recovered and the safety of their home country, stressing that

identification at this very juncture dictates whether a person receives state protection or remains exposed to further exploitation.

31. Illustrating the operational chaos of mass rescues, **Mr. Winnie Quidato** recounted a June 2023 operation at the Hometown compound where Philippine authorities encountered nearly three thousand individuals across twenty-one nationalities. While state screeners struggled to differentiate victims from handlers, syndicate lawyers were already inside the building orchestrating re-elected repatriation, effectively steering foreign nationals back into the hands of the criminal networks. To combat this lawyer's trap and address the failure of outdated frameworks built for visibly distressed victims rather than educated professionals promoted to supervisory roles, he proposed five critical commitments. These include decoupling identification from prosecution, building a pre-screened roster of interpreters, establishing special mass rescue protocols, prepositioning consular access within the first eight hours, and creating a three-tier protection pipeline that ensures the state's obligation ends only when the victim safely walks through their own front door.
32. **Ms. Ling Li**, Co-founder of EOS Collective, addressed the persistent difficulties in victim identification, primarily focusing on the messy reality of the victim-offender overlap in border regions. She explained that individuals often enter compounds as willing scammers but are subsequently subjected to severe torture, sexual abuse, and forced to recruit others, creating scenarios that do not fit neatly into existing legal victim categories. Compounding this is the impossible burden of proof placed on survivors, as scam operators systematically destroy physical evidence, evolve torture methods to leave no marks, and force victims to record videos or sign documents falsely claiming they entered and left voluntarily. She warned that relying on such superficial evidence leads to massive identification gaps that push the entire illicit ecosystem out of the law enforcement picture.
33. A critical failure in the current system, according to **Ms. Ling Li**, is the lack of a formal referral mechanism between non-governmental organisations, grassroots groups, and law enforcement, which operates in isolated silos separate from tech companies and banking institutions. She emphasised that failing at reintegration directly feeds re-trafficking, as sending survivors home with debt, specialised scam skills, and zero support essentially guarantees their return to the illicit economy. Praising Thailand's multidisciplinary team method as a step in the right direction, she urged stakeholders to break out of their institutional circles and update their methods in response to syndicate adaptations. She concluded by profoundly thanking the survivors, noting that they are the crucial intelligence source providing cryptocurrency wallet addresses, photographs of syndicate bosses, and company names that empower analysts to map and disrupt the criminal networks.
34. **Mr. Andrey Sawchenko**, Vice President of Asia Pacific Programs at the International Justice Mission, urged a fundamental shift in how authorities conduct initial screenings, advocating that responders should look for indicators that trigger the state's duty to provide protection rather than demanding absolute proof of victimhood. Drawing on his organisation's experience assisting over two thousand victims and securing nineteen convictions, he highlighted that survivors emerging from scam compounds suffer severe psychological trauma and rarely adopt the language of the law immediately. He cautioned against misinterpreting trauma responses, noting instances where

officials refused to identify individuals as victims simply because photographs showed them smiling inside the scam centre, completely disregarding that such expressions are often complex survival mechanisms rather than genuine reflections of their experience.

35. If initial interviews are treated as quasi courtrooms, **Mr. Andrey Sawchenko** warned, the system will inherently fail to protect the most vulnerable. Instead, establishing reasonable grounds to believe a person is a victim fulfils the much lower standard required under Article 14 of the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, triggering immediate access to interpretation and rights information. He recommended tailoring identification checklists specifically to forced criminality circumstances by inquiring about surveillance, restricted movement, and internal punishments, rather than relying on frameworks developed for sex trafficking. By focusing on credible suspicion during the first encounter, states can stabilise survivors, build trust, and ultimately secure the full, accurate statements necessary for the successful prosecution of transnational crime syndicates.
36. **During the Open Forum, H.E. Ambassador Yong Chanthalangsy**, Representative of Lao PDR to AICHR, raised a pressing concern regarding the practical standards of identification when recipient countries rescue thousands of people simultaneously. He expressed frustration that the identification process often takes months, during which time destination countries completely exhaust their shelter resources and budgets, leaving them unable to sustain prolonged care. In response, **Mr. Andrey Sawchenko** clarified that establishing reasonable grounds for protection does not mean waiting for the entire criminal justice process to conclude. He emphasised that making a very quick preliminary determination allows authorities to provide immediate protection, which is actually the fastest route to real prosecution because it stabilises victims enough to provide accurate and actionable legal statements.
37. Expanding on the need for rapid action, **Ms. Among Resi** suggested that mass rescue operations must be treated strictly as emergency responses by activating a specific emergency response hour window to streamline immediate needs and triage. She further advocated for expanding current bilateral coordination into robust trilateral or transnational referral mechanisms that incorporate countries of origin, transit, and destination seamlessly. **Mr. Jacinto Amaral** concluded the session by summarising that a true international revolution in tackling forced criminality requires both regional willingness and synchronised operational standards. He thanked the panel for their deeply detailed guidance, noting that bridging the gap between national legal frameworks and immediate on-the-ground consular assistance is paramount to dismantling the ecosystem of harm across ASEAN.

Session 3: Consular Assistance in Practice

38. **H.E. Amb. Yong Chanthalangsy**, Representative of Lao PDR to AICHR, opened the session by expressing deep gratitude to all partners for organising the dialogue at a critical time for the ASEAN region. He observed that Southeast Asia, with a vibrant population of over 700 million situated between global powers like China and India, has inadvertently become a pole of attraction for organised crime. He highlighted the high-level political commitment within the region to address these threats, referencing the 48th ASEAN Summit in Cebu, where leaders formally acknowledged the urgency of combatting cybercrime, as well as the 19th ASEAN meeting on transnational crime,

which focused on building regional capacity. He emphasised that the industrial-scale scamming centres present a massive challenge to regional stability and require immediate, unified interventions from all ASEAN sectoral bodies.

39. **H.E. Amb. Yong Chanthalangsy** further noted that the landscape of the crisis has shifted dramatically, forcing diplomatic missions and law enforcement agencies to grapple with the complex dual status of individuals who transition from being perceived as scammers to recognised survivors of forced criminality. He called for standardised measures to accurately distinguish true victims from willing perpetrators. A major concern he raised was the administrative merry-go-round that occurs during rescue operations, where the sluggish pace of the justice system leaves victims stranded. He pointed out that prolonged legal limbo often leads vulnerable individuals, particularly African nationals, to flee protective shelters and renegotiate contracts with the very same criminal syndicates, underscoring the urgent need for rapid legal protection, welfare, and health assistance immediately following a rescue.
40. **Ms. Nutrawee Sungthanu**, the Director of International Cooperation and Mechanism Group at the Division of Anti-Trafficking in Persons (DATIP), Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Thailand, provided a comprehensive overview of the Thai government experience, noting that Thailand serves simultaneously as a country of origin, transit, and destination for trafficking victims. While commercial sexual exploitation remains a primary concern, she reported a massive increase in cyber and online forced criminality cases, despite a slight overall decline in 2025. Last year, the Thai government formally identified 561 victims, split evenly between Thai citizens and foreign nationals, providing them with extensive protection, including food, shelter, medical treatment, vocational training, legal aid, and qualified translators. Furthermore, the government facilitated the rescue and processing of 4407 potential victims of online scams across a wide variety of nationalities, demonstrating the massive operational burden placed on frontline responders.
41. **Ms. Nutrawee Sungthanu** outlined the two primary tracks for repatriation: the standard operating procedure for victims identified within Thailand who receive full financial and logistical support, and traditional diplomatic channels for transit victims from countries without bilateral agreements. She highlighted several persistent challenges, including the lengthy legal proceedings that leave victims without income, the difficulty of investigating crimes that physically occurred outside Thai jurisdiction, and the limited capacity to conduct deep screening on every transit migrant. Moving forward, she advocated for robust international cooperation, citing ongoing partnerships with Indonesian counterparts and the International Organization for Migration to develop comprehensive consular guidelines. She also stressed the need for closer collaboration with African embassies to overcome logistical hurdles, such as Ethiopian Airlines refusing to accept certain emergency travel documents for repatriated victims.
42. **Mr. Bong Yik Jui**, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Malaysia in Bangkok, detailed the highly complex task facing the Malaysian Embassy in Bangkok, which is frequently pressured by politicians and families to locate missing persons who have actually been trafficked into Myanmar. He revealed a contentious dynamic where the Royal Malaysian Police previously declared that up to 90 percent of repatriated individuals were not genuine victims, yet the embassy remains obligated to provide humanitarian assistance and facilitate their return. He explained the strict operational

parameters at the Mae Sot border, where diplomats have a narrow four-day window to determine if an individual will face criminal deportation or be formally repatriated directly into the custody of Malaysian border authorities.

43. **Mr. Bong Yik Jui** emphasised that consular efforts are almost entirely reactive due to immense external obstacles, including the ongoing political situations in Myanmar and the severe earthquakes of early 2025. Diplomats face severe logistical and linguistic barriers, often requiring Chinese translators and bringing their own printers to the border to issue emergency travel documents on the spot. He noted that the 15-day procedure under the National Referral Mechanism is so burdensome that many individuals falsely admit to being scammers simply to expedite their journey home. Looking ahead to January 2026, he highlighted new Malaysian legislation designed to hold social media platforms accountable for user safety, which he argued is a necessary step to prevent recruitment and curb the illicit networks.
44. **Mr. Tony Wibawa**, the Head of Sub Directorate for Other Regions Outside Southeast Asia and the Middle East at the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, shared the Indonesian perspective, reinforcing the difficulty of distinguishing genuine victims from willing organisers without conducting extensive, expert-led interviews. He pointed out that the three-to-five-year rotation cycle for diplomatic staff constantly drains institutional knowledge, requiring expensive and continuous retraining of personnel. This financial burden is immense, with the Indonesian government spending over 300,000 dollars on repatriation efforts in 2025 alone, subjecting the ministry to rigorous quarterly audits. He argued that the mandated 45-day waiting period for formal victim identification is highly counterproductive, as exhausted survivors frequently confess to crimes just to avoid the prolonged detention and return home immediately.
45. **Mr. Tony Wibawa** urged governments to recognise that they cannot solve this crisis in isolation and must build transparent partnerships with non-governmental organisations and intergovernmental bodies that possess dedicated funding for flights and rehabilitation. More importantly, he highlighted the deep socioeconomic roots of the crisis, warning that large casinos and scam centres currently serve as the primary economic engines for the native populations in certain areas of Cambodia and Myanmar. He stressed that any regional strategy aiming to eradicate these compounds must concurrently establish alternative livelihoods for the affected local communities, or the eradication efforts will completely collapse the surrounding legitimate economies and breed further instability.
46. **H.E. Mrs. E.A.S. Wijayanthi Edirisinghe**, the Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Thailand, described the specific demographic profile of Sri Lankan victims, who are typically young, fluent in English, and highly proficient in information technology, though lacking formal higher education. Lured by visa-free entry into Thailand, these individuals are routinely trafficked across the border into Myanmar. She explained that consular assistance is severely crippled because neither the Sri Lankan nor the Myanmar embassies can physically access the remote, rebel-held compounds where these citizens are subjected to severe physical and mental torture. Because many victims are instructed to enter Thailand as tourists, they are rarely flagged during initial border screenings, making early identification nearly impossible.

47. **H.E. Mrs. E.A.S. Wijayanthi Edirisinghe** commended the Thai authorities for establishing a systematic monitoring and rescue framework that has provided crucial assistance to Sri Lankan nationals. She warned the assembly that forced criminality has evolved from a regional issue into a worldwide phenomenon, revealing that criminal syndicates have recently attempted to establish new scamming centres directly within Sri Lanka. She reported that the Sri Lankan government took swift pre-emptive action, arresting over 700 individuals, mostly foreign nationals, who were attempting to set up illicit operations. This reverse migration of criminal infrastructure, she argued, proves that all nations are vulnerable and must maintain aggressive, transnational vigilance.
48. **During the open forum, H.E. U Nyunt Swe**, the representative of Myanmar to AICHR, intervened to assert that the Myanmar government treats the eradication of scam compounds as a top national priority, pointing to unprecedented military operations conducted in October 2025. H.E. U Nyunt Swe clarified that the resources and capital used to build these illicit cities do not originate from within Myanmar, and that victims are smuggled across porous land borders rather than entering through the strictly monitored international airports in Yangon, Naypyidaw, or Mandalay. H.E. U Nyunt Swe then questioned **Mr. Bong Yik Jui**, asking if the Malaysian embassy had empirical evidence of citizens willingly participating in the online scams for their own financial benefit rather than being genuine victims.
49. **Mr. Bong Yik Jui** responded by confirming that embassy investigations, combined with direct reports from family members, revealed that a portion of the rescued individuals were indeed working in the compounds for personal gain. While he acknowledged the political commitment of the Myanmar government, he pointed out that local authorities exercise virtually no control over territories dominated by ethnic armed groups. He cited specific incidents, such as the bombings in Myawaddy the previous year, which were deliberately executed by criminal syndicates to destroy physical evidence of torture rooms before international investigators could arrive. He concluded that these profound jurisdictional and security obstacles completely paralyse diplomatic interventions, making it imperative for the international community to prioritise immediate humanitarian rescue over complicated legal and territorial disputes.

Session 4: Reflecting on the Non-Punishment Principle

50. **H.E. Anita Ashvini Wahid**, the Representative of Indonesia to AICHR, opened the final session of the day by framing the non-punishment principle as a critical safeguard within the regional ecosystem of human rights and transnational crime. She noted that the rise of online scam compounds has created a complex legal environment where the line between a victim and a perpetrator is often blurred by coercion. The moderator emphasised that a coordinated regional response is necessary to ensure that individuals rescued from these compounds are not further victimised by the very legal systems intended to protect them.
51. **H.E. Anita Ashvini Wahid** observed that while the previous sessions focused on the technicalities of rescue and identification, this session would delve into the ethical and legal obligations of states to refrain from punishing victims for crimes they were forced to commit. She highlighted that the Indonesian government is particularly concerned with how mobile and borderless these criminal networks have become, requiring a stackable jurisdictional response. The moderator urged the

speakers to consider how ASEAN can harmonise its legal frameworks to address the root of this problem and prevent the criminalisation of trafficked persons before transitioning to the frameworks established by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

52. **Pol. Maj. Taiyawat Vivatkiat**, representing **Pol. Gen. Dr. Thatchai Pitaneelaboot**, Deputy Commissioner General of the Royal Thai Police, provided a detailed look at how the Royal Thai Police interprets the non-punishment principle within the Anti Trafficking in Persons Act. He stated that this is a critical challenge for law enforcement, as rescued individuals are often found working illegally in Thailand or across its borders. Under Section 41 of the Act, Thailand has embedded the non-punishment principle, providing a legal basis to exempt victims from charges related to their forced participation in criminal activities, while Section 61 is utilised to offer immediate protection.
53. **Pol. Maj. Taiyawat Vivatkiat** shared recent statistical data, noting that the Thai government protected fourteen major cases of forced criminality in 2025 and five cases early in 2026. He explained that at the operational level, identifying a victim is an arduous process involving massive screening efforts. In 2025 alone, over fourteen thousand individuals, primarily of Chinese and Indian nationality, underwent this process. To ensure victims are identified carefully, the Royal Thai Police conducts rigorous checks of digital devices and surveillance footage, using evidence such as arrival CCTV to verify facts and change an individual's status from an illegal migrant to a trafficking victim.
54. The speaker stressed the importance of sharing information with international law enforcement and foreign embassies to verify the facts of each case. **Pol. Maj. Taiyawat Vivatkiat** argued that communicating with a victim's family in their home country can often provide the necessary context to define their status. He called for the deployment of qualified, unbiased interpreters and requested sustained financial support for repatriation efforts. He concluded that the non-punishment principle must be reflected not only in the text of the law but in daily practice, ensuring public and institutional recognition that human trafficking victims forced into the commission of crimes must be completely exempted from legal liability.
55. **Ms. Nurul Qoiriah**, Director of Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion and Victim Rights for the ASEAN Australian Counter Trafficking Program, discussed the legal standing of the non-punishment principle within the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons. She specifically pointed to Article 14, outlining the importance of upholding the human rights of victims. She noted that while ASEAN states agreed on the practical importance of this principle during the 2022 Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime in the Philippines, implementation remains highly uneven due to a lack of practical operational guidance for local authorities.
56. **Ms. Nurul Qoiriah** identified that many jurisdictions struggle with determining the appropriate label for victims due to differing legal approaches. She contrasted the narrow duress model with the broader causation model, noting that Indonesia is currently the only ASEAN country fully utilising the causation model to exempt individuals from punishment if their illicit actions were a direct result of being trafficked. Without this model, a significant regional gap persists where individuals caught in forced criminality, such as forced drug trafficking, are arrested, charged, and

encounter their offenders in the justice system long before they have the chance to be properly screened.

57. Addressing these systemic gaps, **Ms. Nurul Qoiriah** highlighted the mutual agreement between the Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime and AICHR to develop unified indicators and tools for regional coherence. She emphasized that international support has grown, noting that in 2024, her program actively supported the Thai and Philippine governments in strengthening their non punishment governance capacity. She concluded that establishing clear, region wide protocols is essential to ensure that prosecution, defence, and sentencing all reflect a rights-based understanding of forced criminality.
58. **Ms. Izza Leghtas**, Human Rights Officer at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, explained that the non-punishment principle was first clearly articulated in her office's Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking. She stated that the principle must be placed at the centre of both prevention and protection efforts. In the context of scam compounds, she clarified that the issue of an individual's initial consent is legally irrelevant if coercion or deception was ultimately used and stressed that the definition of punishment must encompass both criminal penalties and administrative immigration sanctions.
59. **Ms. Izza Leghtas** spoke specifically about the severe vulnerabilities of migrants in transit, particularly those who may not strictly meet the criteria of a refugee or asylum seeker but have suffered immense health and safety violations. She argued against the use of detention as an instrument of immigration control for these individuals, noting that their journey often leaves them undocumented and traumatised. Instead, she advocated for the creation of protected spaces that ensure their liberty and facilitate their physical and psychological recovery.
60. The speaker raised profound concerns about the long-lasting consequences of wrongly punishing victims, noting that criminalisation creates systemic fear that prevents survivors from coming forward to authorities. **Ms. Izza Leghtas** called for comprehensive legislative reform and targeted training for officials handling labour migration reception. She emphasised that recognising victimhood is a fundamental state responsibility and that applying the non-punishment principle is a vital tool for dismantling criminal networks by empowering survivors to speak out safely.
61. **Mr. Rafendi Djamin**, a member of the Governing Board of the Human Rights Resource Centre and the first Indonesian representative to AICHR, characterised the session as a necessary time of reflection for the region. He outlined the dual role of human rights mechanisms as providing direct victim protection and establishing robust complaint mechanisms. While acknowledging the institutional and legal confrontations inherent in interpreting the ASEAN Charter, he asserted the absolute necessity of prioritising human rights within the broader scope of regional development and law enforcement.
62. **Mr. Rafendi Djamin** directly addressed the political and financial realities of the crisis, questioning whether governments possess the political will to spend the millions of dollars required to support genuine victim protection rather than defaulting to political punishment. He emphasised the indispensable role of civil society organisations, describing them as essential technical partners

that provide vital psychological support and act as crucial watchdogs to scrutinise state compliance with international human rights standards.

63. Urging the active implementation of regional commitments, **Mr. Rafendi Djamin** called on Ministries of Foreign Affairs across ASEAN to learn from one another's best practices. He praised AICHR's evolving role within the Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime but insisted that the commission must transcend being a mere presenter to become a robust promoter of regional cooperation. Referencing the recent rescue of five thousand victims from the Cambodian fracture, he stressed that the massive scale of the crisis demands immediate and innovative reintegration strategies.
64. **During the Open Forum**, a participant inquired about the mechanisms available to rectify state errors and assume responsibility when victims are wrongly punished. **Pol. Maj. Taiyawat Vivatkiat** responded by acknowledging that law enforcement must humbly accept when errors occur during chaotic mass rescues. He noted that securing the financial resources to intervene effectively remains a primary hurdle, especially because criminal syndicates constantly redesign their scam operations to outperform state detection capabilities, making it difficult for police to assess the day-to-day realities of the victims.
65. Adding to the response, **Ms. Nurul Qoiriah** stressed the critical importance of establishing multiple layers of investigative mechanisms. She explained that frontline responders must carefully assess the individual context and original intent of each person detained at the border. By referring complex cases to specialised, higher-level authorities, states can prevent the wrongful criminalisation of individuals who are swept up in the massive influx of trafficked persons at international borders.
66. **Mr. Rafendi Djamin** contributed by reflecting on the unique challenges faced by Indonesia, noting that the dynamics of forced criminality abroad represent a complete departure from traditional human rights violations. He emphasised that governments must undergo an international revolution in how they view state responsibility, adapting their legal frameworks to address these novel transnational challenges proactively rather than relying on outdated migration protocols.
67. Another participant asked about the specific role of networking and regional communication in improving rights protection. **Ms. Izza Leghtas** answered that rigorous cross-border networking is essential to ensure that victims can eventually return to acceptable employment and enjoy their fundamental rights. She highlighted that seamless communication between regional law enforcement and civil society greatly increases the chances of identifying victims accurately before irreversible administrative penalties are applied.
68. Concluding the open forum, **Mr. Rafendi Djamin** reiterated that scrutinising government actions through the lens of international organisations is a vital component of a healthy democratic society. He urged states to focus on creating prompt and effective protection mechanisms that can be actively utilised within national borders to safeguard vulnerable populations. The moderator, **H.E. Anita Ashvini Wahid**, then closed the session by thanking the speakers and affirming that the proper implementation of the non-punishment principle remains the cornerstone of achieving justice for survivors across ASEAN.

Disrupting Scam Ecosystems: Addressing Concerns of Victims and Strengthening Regional Responses

69. **Mr. B.C. Tan**, Managing Director and Head of Southeast Asia in the Investigations, Diligence and Compliance practice at Kroll, opened the networking reception by extending his gratitude to **H.E. Asst. Prof. Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang** for the invitation, as well as acknowledging key partners including the International Organization for Migration, the Thai Government, and the Australian Embassy. Drawing on his background as a financial investigator and his previous collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, he emphasised that criminal syndicates have successfully built a highly functional ecosystem of harm. To combat this, he argued that the human rights and law enforcement communities must build an equally robust and collaborative ecosystem. Reflecting on earlier remarks made by **Mr. Jason G. Tower**, he noted that today's scam compounds are the ultimate manifestation of industrialisation and professionalisation. This raises a central analytical question regarding how the region measures success: whether it is defined strictly by a reduction in human trafficking victims or by a decrease in global financial losses.
70. Expanding on the economic realities of the crisis, **Mr. B.C. Tan** highlighted the staggering pace at which massive, industrial-scale scam compounds are constructed overnight in traditionally undeveloped border regions, driven by virtually limitless illicit capital. He explained that responders are fundamentally fighting a fully realised illicit economy. Historically, there has been a consistent correlation and co-dependence between physical casinos and scam compounds, which often share physical infrastructure and financial networks. The massive cash flows generated originally by casinos are now systematically reinvested to fuel a mutually reinforcing cycle of human trafficking, illegal gambling, and drug trafficking.
71. This criminal ecosystem has achieved vertical integration, with syndicates now operating their own cryptocurrency banks, technology providers, human resources networks, and landholding companies to facilitate highly effective money laundering. **Mr. B.C. Tan** pointed out the severe economic inefficiency of the current regional response, where governments are forced to spend millions to harden defences and rescue victims while scammers continuously steal billions. He asserted that targeting illicit finance must be the absolute core of the region's focus. By tracking transient compound owners and the high-level actors who ultimately benefit from the cash flow, authorities can alter the cost-benefit equation for criminals. He concluded his segment by urging stakeholders to double down on collaborative, transnational investigations to close the widening gap between criminal innovation and state response.
72. **Mr. John Wojcik**, a former UNODC analyst currently with Infoblox, shifted the focus toward disrupting the digital infrastructure and technical scale of the syndicates. Representing a company that specialises in protective Domain Name System security, he explained how his team utilises sophisticated algorithms and human intelligence to block millions of malicious domains before they can be weaponised against the public. He outlined how the regional threat has matured from isolated casino cities into highly sophisticated cybercrime hubs. These hubs are no longer just pushing rudimentary financial scams; they are actively distributing malicious fake links, harvesting biometric data, and operating complex cryptocurrency exchanges and rogue financial institutions that serve as the backstop for global cybercrime.

73. **Mr. John Wojcik** warned that the underground, primarily Chinese-speaking market is diversifying into highly dangerous territories. Online casinos, once dismissed by some authorities as mere illicit gaming, are now fully integrated vectors for malware distribution and data theft. He highlighted the rampant sale of advanced surveillance technologies, such as deepfake software and IMSI-catchers or false base stations, which were once the exclusive domain of state intelligence. Referencing mass raids in the Philippines, he cautioned that if law enforcement only succeeds in reducing the physical number of human trafficking victims without dismantling the digital infrastructure, syndicates will simply pivot to automation and artificial intelligence, making their operations even harder to investigate and prosecute.
74. To illustrate the terrifying scale of these digital operations, **Mr. John Wojcik** shared details of a recent investigation into a Cambodian scam centre that was operating a massive global malware distribution network. Researchers successfully infiltrated the operation, discovering that the syndicates were selling malware-as-a-service and attempting to install data-harvesting software on upwards of eighteen million customer machines globally to drain personal wealth. The actors had successfully impersonated twenty-one different government services and major corporations, including Ryanair and the Thai, South Korean, and Colombian governments. However, he provided a note of optimism by citing a case in Ukraine where protective digital interventions resulted in a thirty to forty percent reduction in scam efficacy, proving that deploying technical solutions at scale can severely disrupt the criminals' route to market and buy crucial time for cross-border investigations.
75. During the open forum, **H.E. Amb. Nguyen Trung Thanh**, the Representative of Viet Nam to AICHR, asked about the overarching political dimensions of the crisis and how citizens can better protect themselves. **Mr. John Wojcik** responded that while immense political will is required to tackle this issue, society has simultaneously entered a "post-content verification age" where unsolicited digital links and communications can no longer be trusted, necessitating extreme due diligence from the public. Adding to this, **Mr. B.C. Tan** acknowledged that corruption, lack of resources, and limited opportunities exacerbate the crisis, but emphasised that the global nature of both the internet and the financial system means no single country has total jurisdictional dominance. This inherent structural vulnerability requires states to prioritise collective intelligence sharing over siloed national responses.
76. **Mr. Jacinto Amaral**, the Assistant to the Representative of Timor-Leste to AICHR, raised a critical question regarding the region's readiness to handle the financial and technological aspects of cryptocurrency. He observed that while some Latin American countries have adopted digital tokens as legal tender, most ASEAN member states lack the formal legal frameworks and law enforcement expertise necessary to address decentralised finance platforms like Ethereum. In response, **Mr. B.C. Tan** corrected the common misconception that cryptocurrency is an untraceable black box, explaining that the blockchain is the most transparent financial ledger in existence. The true vulnerability, he argued, is not the technology itself but the severe deficit of traditional financial investigation expertise among law enforcement agencies tasked with tracing these digital assets.

77. Expanding on the topic of digital currency adoption, **Mr. John Wojcik** noted that despite the current investigative hurdles, many countries in the region are actively preparing to integrate cryptocurrency into their formal economies, acknowledging that Timor-Leste has seen significant investor interest and corporate development in this sector over the past year. To close the evening's presentation, **Mr. B.C. Tan** expressed his deep appreciation for the participants' time and dedication. He issued a final plea for all stakeholders to actively share their investigative stories and data across borders, reiterating that a unified, transparent, and technically informed regional network is the only way to give ASEAN a fighting chance against such a deeply entrenched criminal ecosystem.

Session 5: Repatriation and Reintegration

78. **Ms. Umavathni Vathanaganthan**, Assistant to the Representative of Malaysia to AICHR, opened the second day's first session by asserting that repatriation is merely the initial step in a much longer journey toward recovery. She argued that the regional response must move beyond simply returning individuals to their countries of origin and instead focus on creating durable, long-term reintegration solutions. She noted that without addressing the underlying economic and psychological needs of survivors, the risk of re-trafficking remains a critical threat. This necessitates a multi-sectoral commitment from both host and home nations to break the cycle of exploitation effectively.
79. **Atty. Darlene Reyes Pajarito**, Undersecretary for Licensing Anti-Trafficking-in-Persons at the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) of the Philippines, detailed her country's comprehensive three-tier protection pipeline. This system ensures survivors are safeguarded from the moment they leave a compound gate until they walk through their own front door. She explained that this framework includes immediate legal assistance, medical care, and economic support for families. These services are institutionalised through dedicated diversity officers to ensure that marginalised groups, including the LGBTQIA+ community, are prioritised and not left behind in development outcomes.
80. She further explained that the DMW works to proactively monitor recruitment agencies to prevent the initial trafficking stage. By implementing rigorous licensing requirements and conducting regular inspections, the Philippines aims to reduce the systemic vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit. **Atty. Pajarito** emphasised that human rights must be grounded in local reality, requiring the empowerment of local government units to uphold dignity through evidence-based policymaking. She concluded by urging ASEAN member states to waive administrative fines for rescued victims, as these financial burdens often act as a barrier to a swift and dignified return to their families.
81. **Mr. Sukarman Kasmo Sarno**, Director of Entrepreneurship and Productive Business Development at the Ministry of Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers, introduced the Calmi program. This initiative focuses on economic reintegration by matching returnees with legitimate jobs in the technology sector or providing specialised entrepreneurship training. He noted that many scam victims possess high digital literacy and urban backgrounds, making them uniquely suited for

modern labour markets if provided with the correct opportunities. He argued that the state must act as an agent of change by providing alternatives to the high-pressure illicit economy.

82. **Mr. Sarno** also addressed the root causes of migration, specifically the desire for decent work, which can be mitigated through data mapping at the village level. By identifying returnees and their specific skills, the Indonesian government can provide a strategic vaccine against the deceptive recruitment tactics used by criminal syndicates. He stressed that trust between the private sector, civil society, and government institutions is the only way to ensure that funds allocated for these missions are used effectively. His presentation concluded with a call for a regional collective protocol that shifts the focus from managing returnees to engaging them as partners.
83. **Chanika**, a Lived Experience Expert, provided a poignant account of the psychological prison created by traffickers through a process he termed fear inversion. He described how syndicates spent months convincing him that the police were his enemies who would immediately imprison him if he escaped, creating a mental barrier that persisted long after his actual rescue. He highlighted the debilitating stigma returnees face, often being dismissed by society as having been too stupid to recognise a scam. Chanika urged policymakers to include survivors in the design of reintegration programs, emphasising that their unique wisdom is vital for creating humane systems.
84. **During the open forum session**, a participant from the ASEAN Youth Forum asked about the mechanisms available to support returnees at the village level, where recruitment often begins. **Mr. Sukarman** responded that meaningful participation requires reaching the lowest administrative units and ensuring that local budgets are specifically allocated for victim assistance. **Pol. Maj. Taiyawat Vivatkiat** added that law enforcement must be humble enough to accept errors when a victim is wrongly punished. He noted that financial resources to intervene are often the biggest hurdle to rectifying these mistakes, especially when syndicates outperform the state in their infrastructure design.

Session 6: Addressing the Ecosystem of Harm and ASEAN Cooperation to Assist Scam Victims

85. **H.E. Amb. Nguyen Trung Thanh**, the Representative of Viet Nam to AICHR, opened the session by highlighting a significant shift in the regional understanding of scam compounds. He noted that these operations are no longer viewed as isolated criminal incidents but as a highly structured, borderless ecosystem of harm that exploits modern hyper-connectivity. This fragmentation has resulted in the emergence of shadow governments within the compounds, where criminal groups operate entirely outside national laws, rendering traditional diplomatic channels and consistent victim identification efforts largely ineffective.
86. **H.E. Amb. Nguyen Trung Thanh** emphasised that the industrialisation of this ecosystem must be met with an integrated and collective response, positioning Southeast Asia as the principal frontline for global intervention. He called for a transition from fragmented, reactive institutional structures to a more proactive form of governance that prioritises victim-centred and trauma-informed protection. He asserted that ASEAN has a unique opportunity to serve as a strategic platform for broader international coordination, ensuring that human rights are not separated from law enforcement strategies in the urgent fight against illicit financial systems.

87. **Ms. Nareeluc Pairchaiyapoom**, Director of the International Human Rights Division at the Ministry of Justice of Thailand, shared Thailand's role in navigating the broader ecosystem of harm surrounding scam compounds. She described the shift from individual scammers to organised, industrial-scale operations that create multiple layers of victimisation and move with extreme agility. These compounds often relocate to clandestine jungle areas following crackdowns, relying on a combination of forced labour trafficking, sophisticated illicit technology, and local corruption to maintain their impunity across regional borders.
88. To address these challenges, she outlined Thailand's reliance on 24-hour agencies like the Anti-Cyber Scam Centre and the Anti-Online Scam Operation Centre, which provide a one-stop service linking several ministries for rapid response. **Ms. Nareeluc** advocated for a victim-based model within the ASEAN framework, moving away from purely law-based approaches that harbour biases against coerced individuals. She emphasised that through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), authorities must implement screening procedures that differentiate victims from perpetrators, ensuring survivors have access to essential justice and psychological care.
89. **Pol. Sr. Col. Dr. Kongkrissada Kittithiraphong**, Executive Director of the ASEANAPOL Secretariat, presented a strategy on behalf of national police forces to dismantle criminal silos. He shared the high-profile case of a cross-border scam from Cambodia, as a prime example of why harmonised legislation is necessary to stop perpetrators from evading arrest. He argued that ASEANAPOL must move beyond fragmented operations by treating the scam industry as a unified criminal ecosystem that requires a single, cohesive vision from all ten member countries.
90. He detailed the implementation of the Anti-Scam Combat Task Force (ASCOT), which standardises intelligence platforms and electronic databases across the region to ensure that all teams operate with a shared mechanism. A critical component of this strategy is the A-Border module, designed to monitor the movement of victims and traffickers in real-time. This system aims to break the self-sustaining criminal cycle by making data on abductions and recruitment immediately visible across jurisdictions, preventing victims from being re-trafficked after they have been deported.
91. **Dr. Winston Casio**, representing the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission (PAOCC) of the Philippines, addressed the government paralysis that frequently leads to the re-victimisation of survivors. He shared a poignant account of a victim giving birth in a detention centre while waiting for administrative charges to be resolved, arguing that prolonged incarceration for labour violations represents a systemic failure. He posited that the cost of maintaining victims in jail far exceeds the investment required for humanitarian assistance and immediate repatriation, urging governments to act with more empathy and compassion.
92. He specifically warned against the lawyers' trap, where criminal syndicates hire high-priced attorneys to interfere with screening processes during raids and steer victims back into criminal networks. To combat this, **Dr. Casio** proposed five concrete regional commitments, including the prepositioning of consular access within the first eight hours of a rescue and the creation of a three-tier protection pipeline. He concluded that a state's obligation to a trafficked person does not end at a gate, but only once they have safely walked through their own front door.

93. **Archangela**, a Lived Experience Expert, provided a vivid account of the psychological prison found within modern scam compounds. She described being trafficked by a close friend into a facility that appeared luxurious from the outside but functioned as a heavily fortified prison where victims were forced into 18-hour shifts regardless of their health. She spoke of the legal vacuum survivors face upon rescue, where the lack of documents and unfamiliarity with the justice system often leads them to admit to being scammers simply to end their cycle of detention and go home.
94. She asserted that the current regional failure to provide adequate reintegration support is a primary driver of re-trafficking, as returnees often carry the specialised skills of the scam industry but lack any legitimate livelihood. **Archangela** expressed her gratitude for her rescue but urged a shift in how survivors are viewed, moving them from being seen as statistics to being recognised as essential partners in justice. She concluded by highlighting that victims are the most important source of intelligence, providing the digital wallet addresses and photos necessary to map and dismantle syndicate hierarchies.
95. **During the Open Forum**, a representative from the Embassy of Malaysia inquired about the feedback from countries utilising the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for repatriating citizens. **Ms. Nareeluc Pairchaiyapoom** responded that while the NRM is vital for identifying true victims, the feedback remains inconsistent due to the differing political will and legal frameworks of each member state. She admitted that coordinating these diverse national realities is a primary hurdle but remains a priority for Thai social officials.
96. Further discussion, prompted by the representative from ASEAN Youth Forum, touched on the sustainability of accountability beyond five-year political terms. **Dr. Winston Casio** argued that trust between the private sector, civil society, and government institutions is the only way to ensure that funds are used transparently and effectively. He emphasised that the presence of consular officers is the most robust answer to the legal resources of syndicates, and that officials must prioritise humanity over their own bureaucratic careers to prevent the continued exploitation of the vulnerable

Site Visit to the Pathum Thani Welfare Protection Centre for Victims of Trafficking-in-Persons

97. **Mr. Samavi Pongthanyaleelai**, Senior Programme Officer from the International Organization for Migration, opened the site visit by framing the deep nexus between transnational crime and human rights, emphasising the absolute need for equality in law enforcement and the swift restoration of human dignity. He provided a comprehensive introduction to the Thai government's protection system, explaining that the Pathum Thani Welfare Protection Centre is one of nine specialised facilities operating under the Division of Anti-Trafficking in Persons within the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. Historically, these shelters were strictly segregated by gender, with four dedicated to males, four to women and children, and one specifically for boys. However, acknowledging the rapidly evolving demographic profile of trafficking victims, the government has recently shifted toward a highly inclusive approach designed to seamlessly accommodate complete family units and LGBTQ individuals within a unified, supportive environment.
98. Recognising that the nine state-run shelters are insufficient to cover all seventy-seven provinces in Thailand, **Mr. Samavi Pongthanyaleelai** detailed the government's strategic initiative to ally with

civil society organisations and non-governmental entities. The state has authorised five private shelters, including facilities in Chiang Mai and Chonburi, to operate with official government permission and the same legal status as state centres. This expansion not only increases geographical coverage but also crucially provides survivors with the freedom of choice, actively alleviating the deep-seated fears many victims harbour toward government authorities. He further elaborated on Thailand's National Referral Mechanism, a cooperative transnational framework formalised several years ago. This four-step process begins with immediate screening upon rescue, followed by a mandatory reflection period, ensuring that potential victims are not mistakenly treated as immigration violators while arresting authorities meticulously gather evidence to file cases and coordinate cross-border protection.

99. Upon receiving the delegation at the facility, **Ms. Wandee Triyodsin**, the Director of the Pathum Thani Welfare Protection Centre, formally welcomed the guests and presented the centre's recent architectural and operational transformation. Through detailed video presentations and an interactive tour, she showcased how the facility was entirely reconstructed in 2023, utilising universal design principles to become a comprehensive shelter for all. The physical upgrades include disability-friendly wide spaces, private accommodations tailored for family victims to simulate a home environment, and specialised all-gender restrooms curated to provide safety and alleviate anxiety for transgender individuals. Furthermore, the shelter heavily respects religious and cultural sensitivities by providing dedicated Muslim prayer rooms and offering Buddha statues to Myanmar victims seeking spiritual comfort. To ensure maximum security alongside this inclusivity, the facility is equipped with eighteen surveillance cameras and maintains dedicated caretakers stationed continuously on every floor to support the one hundred and twenty-eight victims currently housed there.
100. Detailing the centre's robust rehabilitation strategies, **Ms. Wandee Triyodsin** emphasised a heavily trauma-informed care approach designed specifically to address post-traumatic stress disorder. The facility relies on a highly coordinated multidisciplinary network involving the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Justice, the International Justice Mission, the International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Within the shelter, victims have access to innovative therapeutic spaces, including specialised counselling rooms for music and talking therapies, as well as an exercise area fully equipped by the International Justice Mission. To gently acclimate survivors to the justice system, the centre features a mock courtroom to prepare them mentally for actual legal proceedings. For any severe physical or psychological ailments, the interdisciplinary team ensures seamless coordination with nearby hospitals for specialised medical care, guaranteeing that every individual is stabilised before reintegration begins.
101. **Ms. Wandee Triyodsin** highlighted the shelter's progressive departure from traditional, restrictive protection models by actively promoting the victims' freedom of movement and personal autonomy. Survivors are explicitly permitted to leave the shelter premises for essential purposes, such as attending educational programs, running necessary errands, or visiting relatives, strictly without undue interference or control from the staff. Inside the centre, a dedicated social media zone with free wireless internet allows victims to maintain vital communication with their families in their home countries, while a former nursery room has been thoughtfully converted into a quiet

library to support continued learning. By prioritising this freedom of choice and fostering open engagement within the community, the shelter successfully restores the survivors' agency and equips them with the daily life skills required to eventually lead normal, fulfilling lives upon their reintegration into society.

102. The economic empowerment and legal restitution of the survivors form the final pillar of the centre's holistic approach, as detailed by **Ms. Wandee Triyodsin**. The shelter partners closely with the private sector to offer hands-on vocational training in high-demand fields, including welding and electrical work tailored for the construction sector, alongside comprehensive Thai language classes to minimise workplace communication barriers. Victims are legally permitted to work both inside and outside the shelter, where they are guaranteed the national minimum wage and are trained to enhance their skills to secure even higher earnings. The centre ensures that all survivors manage their own transparent financial accounts and assists them in transferring remittances back to their home countries. Concurrently, legal officers diligently seek restitution for unpaid wages and criminal damages while thoroughly educating the survivors on their labour rights, a critical step intended to completely prevent them from being re-victimised when they eventually re-enter the broader labour market.
103. Opening the forum session, **H.E. Anita Ashvini Wahid**, Representative of Indonesia to AICHR, expressed profound gratitude to the centre, emphasising that restoring the dignity of highly traumatised individuals must remain the core focus of the ASEAN community. Following this, **Mr. Bong Yik Jui** inquired about the specific criteria for accepting foreign nationals and the process of repatriation. **Ms. Wandee Triyodsin** explained that admission is based entirely on formal identification under the National Referral Mechanism, accommodating all nationalities and gender identities inclusively. She noted that while the centre assists with legal prosecution, it firmly respects a victim's choice to abstain from filing a case. Many victims, particularly children from Myanmar, refuse to press charges because their traffickers are often neighbours or extended family members; filing a case could invite violent retaliation against their relatives at home. In these instances, the centre does not compel participation in the justice system but instead works alongside international partners to facilitate safe, voluntary repatriation.
104. Addressing a question regarding the management of severe trauma among victims of forced criminality, **Ms. Wandee Triyodsin** reiterated that trauma-informed care dictates every operational protocol at the shelter. She acknowledged that every victim presents a unique psychological profile, requiring staff to carefully observe and respect individual privacy boundaries. The recent facility reconstruction intentionally moved away from the outdated model of communal sleeping quarters, providing private rooms that significantly aid in psychological stabilisation. An interdisciplinary team is immediately deployed to assess each new arrival, matching them with specific social workers, legal officers, and psychological counsellors tailored to their immediate emotional needs, ensuring that victims who have endured extreme abuse receive highly specialised, individualised care before participating in group vocational or legal activities.
105. A participant subsequently inquired about the logistical and security challenges associated with the center's progressive policy of allowing victims to seek external employment. **Ms. Wandee Triyodsin** acknowledged that while Thai law permits victims of trafficking to receive temporary

identification cards and work permits, managing this freedom involves immense obstacles. Beyond the significant language barriers requiring intensive Thai instruction, she revealed severe security risks inherent to the new demographic of forced criminality victims. The initial screening process occasionally fails to identify individuals who are actually active criminals or syndicate informants infiltrating the shelter to gather intelligence or attempt to re-traffick other survivors. This alarming reality forces the predominantly female staff to exercise extreme vigilance, maintaining strict weekly check-ins and close coordination with vetted employers to monitor the safety of the victims working off-site.

106. The open forum concluded with a specific inquiry from the **Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC)** representative regarding the extent of specialised support provided for transgender and LGBTQ individuals, such as access to hormone therapy. **Ms. Wandee Triyodsin** confirmed the shelter's unwavering commitment to the holistic health of all gender identities. For transgender victims who rely on continuous hormone therapy to maintain their physical and psychological well-being, the centre has established vital partnerships with specialised medical facilities, including Chulalongkorn University, to safely and consistently administer these treatments. She emphasised that providing this profound level of personalised, gender-affirming care significantly builds trust between the survivors and the staff, ultimately encouraging the victims to open up, participate fully in their recovery, and cooperate with the complex legal proceedings against their traffickers.

Site Visit to Anti-Cyber Scam Centre (ACSC), Royal Thai Police

107. **Police Major General Vitthaya Sriprasertpap**, Commander of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Division and the ACSC, welcomed the delegation by emphasising that cyber-enabled scams are a massive transnational threat to both regional economic stability and national security. He positioned the ACSC as a 24-hour centralised hub designed to break down agency silos and facilitate the rapid exchange of information both domestically and internationally. **H.E. Asst. Prof. Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang** highlighted that this visit was a milestone for the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), marking the first time the body has formally investigated the intersection of organised crime and human rights through a site visit to observe Thailand's frontline best practices.
108. **Police Lieutenant Colonel Siwagrit Ditboonyarat** provided a sobering overview of the crisis in Thailand, reporting that in April 2026 alone, the centre recorded nearly 30,000 cases with a monthly financial loss of 1.5 billion THB. Since 2022, Thailand has handled over one million cases, with Facebook identified as the primary platform for scammers, followed by Line and TikTok. He explained that the ACSC's strategy focuses on staying ahead of the criminal cycle through data analytics and close coordination with international partners such as the FBI, the Australian Federal Police (AFP), and the Singapore and Hong Kong police forces.
109. **Police Captain Boonyapha Bencharonskul** detailed the three-layer organisational hierarchy of scam syndicates, which includes the high-level "Boss Group" typically based in offshore havens like Dubai or China, "Mule Teams" recruited to manage fraudulent bank accounts,

and the physical "Factory" compounds where forced labor occurs. She described the chilling scale of sites like KK Park in Myawaddy, a 60,000-acre heavily fortified zone surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. Inside such compounds, investigators have uncovered torture rooms used to punish individuals who fail to meet scam quotas, as well as scripts tailored to target diverse nationalities ranging from Germans to Brazilians.

110. The presentation concluded with **Police Lieutenant Colonel Ekronnakarn Nakniyom** explaining that these compounds originally evolved from legal casinos into sophisticated criminal hubs. He outlined Thailand's ongoing mitigation efforts, which include cutting off electricity, water, and telecommunication signals to border areas where these illegal entities operate. **Major General Vitthaya** added that syndicates are strategically resilient because they avoid victimising citizens of their host country, which allows them to grow without direct local harm or immediate domestic opposition while they focus on exploiting foreign populations.
111. In response to a query from **H.E. Amb. Yong Chanthalangsy**, The Representative of the Lao PDR to AICHR regarding the logistics of evidence processing, **Police Lieutenant Colonel Tammasak Poldach** explained that the sheer volume of data is overwhelming. He noted that extracting and analysing data from a single seized mobile phone can require up to 10 hours of dedicated work by language and technical experts, especially when dealing with the thousands of devices recovered in raids. He further clarified that while scanners used to rely on large machines, modern syndicates now use smaller, portable equipment capable of utilising thousands of phone numbers simultaneously from small apartment operations.
112. **H.E. Amb. Nguyen Trung Thanh**, the Representative of Viet Nam to AICHR, raised the issue of political will and the persistence of these sites despite their high visibility. **Colonel Tammasak** noted that while Thailand shares intelligence and satellite locations with neighbouring jurisdictions, the lack of resources or local political desire occasionally results in centres being reported as "empty" by the time local authorities arrive a week later. This significant challenge underscores the need for faster, real-time cross-border collaboration and a more unified regional vision to disrupt these syndicates effectively.
113. Addressing concerns from participants regarding official corruption, **Major General Vitthaya** asserted that scam prevention is now a National Agenda for the Thai government. He emphasised that the Royal Thai Police take absolute legal action based on evidence against any officer found to be complicit. Regarding the financial recovery process, the team explained that having bank representatives stationed on-site allows the ACSC to freeze suspicious accounts within the first hour of a report, which has successfully led to a 30% reimbursement rate for some victims.
114. The discussion concluded with a revelation on how scammers acquire personal data. The officers shared that information is often sourced from widespread leaks across multiple sectors, including banks, transportation departments, and even military databases. The ACSC emphasised that as long as these "security umbrellas" and data leaks exist, syndicates will continue to adapt. The session ended with a consensus that the only way to disrupt this industrialised ecosystem is through a regional intelligence platform and transparent collaboration that prioritises human life over bureaucratic rigidity.

115. **H.E. Asst. Prof. Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang** closed the dialogue by reflecting on the intensive and rich exchange of insights over the past two days. He noted that the transition from conceptual frameworks to practical on-the-ground observations at the ACSC had reminded all participants that behind every legal and technical question are real survivors requiring an urgent response. He reaffirmed that the dialogue was not merely the end of a conversation but one step in a longer regional effort to protect human dignity and strengthen the rule of law across the ASEAN community. **H.E. Asst. Prof. Dr. Bhanubhatra** announced that the findings would be presented at the next AICHR plenary session in Jakarta to suggest a concrete way forward and ensure the momentum continues.

Closing Remarks and Next Steps

116. **H.E. Asst. Prof. Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang**, the Representative of Thailand to AICHR, delivered the closing remarks for the dialogue. He expressed his sincere appreciation to all participants for their intensive and constructive engagement over the past day and a half. He noted that the discussions had successfully highlighted the complex intersection of organised crime, trafficking, and human rights, reminding everyone that behind every legal question are real people, survivors, and families who require a humane response.
117. He emphasised that the site visit had grounded the conceptual frameworks in practical reality, making the importance of protection and assistance tangible. He reflected on his own journey since joining AICHR, recalling the message of hope shared by his Vietnamese counterpart, **H. E. Amb. Nguyen Trung Thanh. Dr. Bhanubhatra** announced that the dialogue was not a one-time event but a step in a longer regional effort. He confirmed that the outcomes of the dialogue would be shared at the upcoming AICHR plenary session in Jakarta to suggest a concrete way forward.
118. **H.E. Asst. Prof. Dr. Bhanubhatra** concluded by thanking the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, IOM, the Australian Government, and all civil society partners. He urged all delegates to take the good practices and insights gained back to their respective countries to strengthen the rule of law and protect human dignity across borders. He wished all participants a safe journey home, reaffirming that by working together, ASEAN can respond more effectively to the shifting nature of transnational crime.