

ASEAN STEPS UP THE FIGHT AGAINST PEOPLE TRAFFICKING

Wednesday October 27, 2010.
Manila, Philippines.

A new resource has been launched that will help fight people trafficking in the Asia region.

The "ASEAN Handbook on International Legal Cooperation in Trafficking in Persons Cases" has been developed to help improve cooperation between criminal justice officials who are involved in cross-border trafficking investigations.

The Handbook was prepared by technical experts within the Asia Regional Trafficking in Persons Project (ARTIP), an initiative of the Australian Government's Aid Program. Funding was provided by the Australian Government as well as by the European Union through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Senior criminal justice practitioners from all ten ASEAN Member States came together in November 2009 to review and finalize the text.

Trafficking is a serious criminal phenomenon and human rights violation that affects all regions and most countries of the world. While it has proved difficult to accurately gauge the size and scope of the problem, the United Nations has confirmed that there are likely millions of trafficking victims, generating billions of dollars for recruiters, exploiters and others involved in this inhuman trade.

In introducing the Handbook, the Secretary-General of ASEAN acknowledged the scale of the challenges currently facing national criminal justice agencies in dealing with this complex crime: *"In every part of the world, including our own, traffickers are rarely identified, prosecuted and convicted. This is a particular problem for countries of destination, where the most serious forms of exploitation usually take place. In addition, victims of trafficking rarely receive any form of justice or redress for the harms committed against them"*.

The ASEAN Handbook seeks to change this situation by promoting the type of cooperation that will ensure there are no safe havens for traffickers or their assets. It focuses on transnational trafficking cases where victims, perpetrators and evidence are located in more than one country. Such cases are usually very difficult to investigate and prosecute.

The Handbook provides a step-by-step guide to pursuing such cases. It outlines the key forms of international cooperation, from informal police-to-police assistance to mutual legal assistance and extradition. Full documentation necessary for making or responding to a request for cooperation is also provided. The standards set out in key international and regional treaties relating to transnational organized crime, corruption and international legal cooperation are clearly explained. It also enables and enhances collaboration amongst the law enforcement, judiciary and prosecutorial officials of ASEAN, both beneficiary and custodian of the ASEAN Handbook.

"This really is a groundbreaking achievement" says Australian Ambassador to the Philippines, Rod Smith, who spoke at the Handbook's official launch in Manila. "For the first time, ASEAN countries have come together to develop a practical guide that will undoubtedly improve how people trafficking cases are investigated and prosecuted in the region. I want to thank everyone involved in putting it together, especially ASEAN, UNODC, the EU and ARTIP. For those involved in fighting the crime of people trafficking, I truly believe that this will become your go-to

resource for international cooperation”.

“The Handbook is a world-first. It should be required reading for all the criminal justice officials who are involved in combating people trafficking in the region,” says Gary Lewis regional head of the UNODC. “Traffickers and their accomplices who trade in people’s lives are very clever at exploiting national borders to their own benefit. Criminal justice agencies must break down the barriers that prevent them from cooperating effectively with each other. They must work together to ensure that when it comes to crimes such as trafficking, these criminals have no place to run to and no place to hide.”