



NOTES

Session: The COMMIT Process - Opportunities and Challenges 9:00-10:00 a.m. Friday, September 9, 2005

Chair: Mr. Sisouvan Tandavong, General Director, Labour Department
Co-Chair: Ms. Panudda Boonpala, Senior Child Labour Specialist, ILO

Aim of the Session: To provide an overview of the COMMIT Process and Opportunities for Action for the labour perspective in its Sub-regional Plan of Action

Mr. Manop Mekprayoonthong, Deputy Director General, Department of International Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand, made a presentation on the topic *The COMMIT Process: Opportunities and Challenges*. Mr. Manop's presentation, in the form of a written statement, is available in the meeting binder (and in electronic form on this Web site and below)

Ms. Susu Thatun, OIC of the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (UN-IAP) attended the panel to help answer questions.

Mr. Manop's presentation was followed by an active discussion among the participants and the following points were raised/questions asked:

A Cambodian delegate suggested that the Cambodian Ministry of Labour, which currently is not part of the COMMIT process, should be included in the process. He also suggested that workers and employers organizations should be given access to the COMMIT process as observers.

A delegate from Viet Nam agreed that that workers and employers organizations should be given an opportunity to participate in the COMMIT process.

Ms. Thatun explained that the UNIAP has been appointed as the secretariat of the COMMIT process and consequently has no say in who is a member of the process or not; this has been decided by the focal ministries of each country. She recognized that it is an 'obviously a gap' that the Cambodian MOL is not a member in the process and stated that she, through the UNIAP, will recommend that the membership structures will be reviewed. She also emphasized that the COMMIT process is a government initiated, driven and owned process, and it therefore gives limited scope for workers and employers organizations to participate. She did, however, suggest that there are opportunities for involvement of workers and employers organizations in for example PPC 11¹.

A delegate from Lao PDR agreed with the point raised by the Cambodian delegate. In the case of Lao PDR, the COMMIT task force is represented by the Director General of the Social Welfare Department (MoLSW), but there is no participation of the Director General of Labour Department (MoLSW) and indicated that this was a gap in the implementation.

¹ Strengthen regional cooperation with the tourism sector to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, especially children and women.

Ms. Thatun took note of the comment from Lao PDR.

A delegate from Viet Nam again emphasized that workers and employers organizations should be given an opportunity to participate in the COMMIT process. He also said that the secretariat should make resources available to ensure that all countries have a sound conceptual clarity of the COMMIT process.

Ms. Thatun responded that she will raise the need for better conceptual clarity with the national offices of the UN-IAP project to ensure that the process is clearly understood.

A delegate from China asked for a clarification on what follow-up action the six governments had taken since the first Senior Officials Meeting (SOM).

Ms. Thatun explained that SOM 1 was followed by intense discussions on issues such as human rights, labour standards etc. SOM 2 was followed by a series of nine round table discussions on the development of the Project Proposal Concepts (PPCs) and the six governments reviewed the draft Sub-regional Plan of Action (SPA). In March 2005, the SPA was endorsed in principle, after which additional discussions at the national level was held. The official endorsement of the SPA was made in July 2005 and a meeting was held with all major development partners to mobilize funds for the implementation of the SPA in Aug 2005. During this meeting, Norad committed US\$ 1 million and other donors have made oral commitments.

An ILO representative asked to what extend the six governments will also allocate funds for the implementation of the SPA.

Mr. Mekprayoonthong responded that the Thai government has allocated 40 million baht (around \$USD 1 million) for anti-trafficking activities, but said that he was not sure to what extend the funds will be available for the implementation of the SPA.

Ms. Thatun added that Thailand has already taken initiative to fund some of its own activities. With regards to other countries, they have, however, indicated that they are not in a position to do so, and need the international community to support the implementation both in terms of technical capacity and financial contribution. Ms. Thatun added that it should be recognized that these countries are committing human resources at the highest political level and if this support could be monetized, the contribution would be substantial.

An ILO representative explained that the ILO is encouraging multi-country processes. However, the TICW project has not been able to involve deeply in the COMMIT process because of the ILO position on Myanmar, but it is possible to extend the collaboration at the national level. She said that the PPC 10² offers a blue-print for collaboration at the national level and that the TICW project already had started work in Cambodia on child sex tourism, which was related to PPC 11. She also said that other aspects of the work done under the TICW project was relevant for PPC 4³. Other relevant activities of the TICW project includes children's participation through the Mekong Children's Forum etc.

Ms. Thatun added that under PPC 1⁴, a regional training programme on conceptual clarity, explaining migration, smuggling, human trafficking etc will be developed. So far, the ADB has contributed US\$ 100,000 to develop the training curriculum. The first course will be conducted in October 2005 with four participants from each country (24 persons in total). The second training is planned to be held in December 2005 where after the curriculum will be finalized and launched. The course will initially be limited to participants from the government, but in the longer run it might be possible to also include NGOs etc.

² Strengthen regional cooperation to prevent and suppress illegal and/or exploitative brokering practices that lead to trafficking.

³ Policy and Cooperation; and Cooperation on investigation and prosecution of traffickers, including joint training and cross-border networking.

⁴ Development of a regional training program on trafficking for anti-trafficking personnel.

In his closing remark, Mr. Mekprayoonthong said that despite the fact that the COMMIT process now has gained momentum, it is important that the participating countries meet regularly. He also mentioned that there are many regional cooperation frameworks and activities in the sub-region, and human trafficking should be integrated into the overall frameworks to be better addressed.