

Sharing experience to stop people smuggling

The United Nations Global Trends Report showed that in 2008 there were 42 million displaced people across the world, including a staggering 15.2 million refugees.

Significantly, the number of people claiming asylum also rose by 28 per cent.

In Australia these figures are reflected in the increased number of asylum seekers arriving illegally by boat. The passengers predominantly originate from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Sri Lanka. Most use people smugglers to help them complete their journey, paying thousands of dollars to go on a perilous and life-threatening voyage.

In recognising the global nature of the problem, the AFP has formulated a three-pronged approach based on the pillars of prosecution, disruption and capacity building. However it recognises that Australia will not be able to resolve the problem of people smuggling on its own.

"This is an issue for the global community," Commissioner Tony Negus said.

"People smuggling is an insidious trade run by those who seek to profit from human misery and the desperation of these displaced people.

"Seeking to end this activity will bring benefits across our region, which is why we are working in close cooperation with our neighbouring law enforcement agencies to bring this practice to an end."

As part of this global approach to combating people smuggling in the South-East Asia region, Commissioner Negus attended the Inter-regional People Smuggling and Human Trafficking Conference held in December at the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement in Indonesia.

Minister for Home Affairs Brendan O'Connor spoke at the conference, which was attended by high ranking law enforcement officials from 17 countries as well as representatives from Interpol.

Mr O'Connor told participants the conference provided them with some excellent opportunities.

"Relationships between policing agencies and even individual officers are essential for effective information sharing and successful investigations," he said.

"Conferences such as this help to strengthen regional cooperation, creating the professional and personal relationships that are essential to good police work."

The conference followed a workshop held in Australia which focused on ways to develop greater synergies between the participating countries at a tactical level.

Both forums focused on the sharing of information between colleagues,

enabling the AFP to gain insight into the situation in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, which are both significant jumping-off points for asylum seekers trying to reach Australia.

Coordinator Capability and Business Support Keiran Miller said people smuggling was a problem that needed to be treated as a significant transnational crime by all nations concerned.

"These meetings are a good opportunity to share information, target the key individuals responsible and to develop better tactical responses," he said.

"There are more workshops planned for the future, and the AFP is providing the mechanism to broker strong, ongoing multiagency working arrangements."

The conferences both focused on the problems of people smuggling from a law enforcement perspective, with the Indonesian forum specifically examining the economic and social impacts of the crime on source, transit and destination countries.

This helped to highlight the complex and multi-jurisdictional nature of the crimes. Often, the evidence trail crosses several international borders and victims can be living in a different country



01: A people smuggling boat **02:** Minister for Home Affairs Brendan O'Connor, Indonesian Police Inspector General Drs Boedhi Santoso Moestary and Commissioner Negus at the Inter-regional People Smuggling and Human Trafficking Conference in Jakarta.

to the people smugglers who took them there. The same set of circumstances can lead to investigations and prosecutions in more than one country.

Close and ongoing cooperation is needed between Australian agencies and their counterparts in other countries through mutual

assistance agreements, extraditions and police-to-police assistance. However, the most effective way to ensure such agreements are successful is through close personal and professional relationships between the members of law enforcement agencies in various countries.

The recent conferences and workshops held by the AFP are just one step towards helping to build these positive relationships and minimise the number of people smuggling operations that are risking people's lives.

