

Migrants from the Mekong neighbourhood are hugely resourceful and resilient, and they demand recognition and respect from their governments

Migrants in the Mekong cannot afford to rely on any government or inter-governmental organization to facilitate or manage their migration or to protect their rights. Instead they self-manage their mobility and self-organise to demand their rights. Migrants have sustained their families and communities without any recognition or facilitation. They have organized systems which are efficient and convenient and appropriate.

In times of crisis, migrants organize their communities to provide shelter and support to migrants in need. Recently, migrant communities throughout Thailand organized fund raising events to support migrants and local people affected by the floods. Meanwhile migrants communities on the borders welcomed their compatriots fleeing the floods in Bangkok and Central Thailand, despite the threat of a crackdown on undocumented migrants by the authorities.

While migrants from the Mekong neighbourhood are hugely resourceful and resilient, they do require recognition and respect from their governments and look forward to governments delivering the following actions:

Migrants would very much like the governments of the Mekong to devote greater resources to essential social services for everyone in the region, which migrants could access in the country of origin and in the country of destination. Migration and migrants should be included in the National and sub-regional Economic and Social Plans.

To be able to participate in the development of their communities and countries, migrants also require more opportunities to study, whether it be in academic or vocational institutions. Migrants request that governments in the region invest in such institutions not only nationally but also regionally for a future fair and equitable regional development.

Migrants require the governments to take immediate actions against all forms of harassment, discrimination and violence that migrants experience on a daily basis from police, immigration,

employers, and others who exploit and take advantage of the migration process. Such violence has negative impacts on the development and security of the people of the Mekong.

Migrants from the Mekong would like the governments to understand that arresting, detaining and deporting migrants on immigration irregularities is a futile activity and a waste of time and money. Migrants need to work, the industry and economy needs the workers and therefore they will return. To solve this situation, migrants request the governments to provide migrants with a status which enables them to stay and work.

This region also witnesses various forms of forced migration and the migrants in these situations require particular protections from governments and UN agencies.

Migrants fleeing the on-going political suppression and armed conflicts in the region, particularly against the Kachin and Karen in Burma, are not in a position to immediately organize themselves and require assistance and protection in the first instance, and stability and integration in the long term. Governments should uphold the principle of non-refoulement of refugees or asylum seekers.

Migrants who have been trafficked are also not in a position to immediately organize themselves. They require governments to uphold their right to justice and to provide access to adequate remedies and compensation. They should not be held in shelters against their will.

In situations where trafficked persons have requested to stay in a shelter, the shelters should be welcoming and provide appropriate, dignified facilities and services.

There are people in the region who have lost their citizenship or have been born without being recognized by any state. The governments of the region and the UN must develop a comprehensive response for all stateless peoples in the region and ensure that they have the right to citizenship.

The Mekong Migration Network acknowledges that while some of the concerns raised in this statement can and should be addressed by the governments of the region, both at national and

sub-regional level, there are also some concerns which would require cooperation with the UN to resolve.

We feel that the UN is the most appropriate host for global discussion on migration and trust that the member states will see fit to return the GFMD permanently to the UN body. We are however concerned that currently the UN has no specific agency to protect and promote the rights of migrants. 21 years after the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrants and Members of their families (1990) was adopted, we strongly believe that it is time for the UN to create its own dedicated agency for migrants.

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