



**'Combatting Forced Migration, Human Trafficking, and Increased Cyber Crime in Asia'
Background Note**

Human trafficking, forced migration, and cybercrime operations have become intertwined crises across Asia, affecting thousands of people in different Asian countries. The convergence of multiple threats constitutes a growing risk not only to regional security but to global security as well. Driven by poverty, political instability, systemic inequality, and expanding digital criminal networks, these issues demand urgent and multilateral responses from all segments of society, including faith-based communities.

Human trafficking is a chronic and egregious abuse of human rights in Asia. The continent is home to a disproportionate number of the global number of trafficked persons, some of whom are lured in by the assurance of decent work and later reduced to situations of exploitation in forced labour, sexual exploitation, or criminal coercion. Cross-border and internal forced migration remain primary agents of exposure to trafficking. Climate change, war, religious persecution, and economic collapse have driven millions out of their homes and into the clutches of traffickers.

In South Asia, conflict zones like Afghanistan and politically fragile contexts such as Pakistan contribute heavily to irregular migration flows. Migrants from these regions are particularly susceptible to trafficking en route to the Arabian Gulf, Southeast Asia, and other destinations. Recent investigations have shown that a significant number of Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi nationals, including those working in information technology (IT) and other young job seekers, have been trafficked to countries like Cambodia under the pretext of tech jobs, only to find themselves forced into online scam centres.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, cybercrime has become a core element of human trafficking in Asia. Initially centred in Cambodia, criminal syndicates have capitalised on legal loopholes and weak law enforcement to expand into countries like Myanmar, Laos, certain northern provinces in China, and the Philippines. Victims—usually young, educated, multilingual men and women—are trafficked and confined in guarded compounds, where they are forced to conduct sophisticated cyber frauds under the threat of violence or death.

These operations include “pig butchering” scams (romance-investment fraud), cryptocurrency schemes, and digital arrest extortion scams targeting victims worldwide. According to the International Justice Mission (IJM), as many as 120,000 people are believed to be held in scam compounds in Myanmar alone, with tens of thousands more across Southeast Asia. Reports of widespread abuses have been confirmed by the UN Human Rights Office, which include arbitrary detention, torture, and coercive criminality, particularly in places outside of effective state control.

Though Southeast Asia has been the epicentre, the crisis has expanded to implicate the wider Asian region and beyond. South Asian victims from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and so on, are increasingly recruited for scam operations in Cambodia and the Mekong Subregion. Simultaneously, Gulf states, long-time destinations of labour migration, remain hotspots of exploitation due to the persistent application of the kafala (sponsorship) system, which binds migrant workers to their employers and severely restricts their rights. Church and ecumenical networks in the Middle East have reported a continued increase of trafficked persons from Asia,



consisting of domestic and construction workers who are subjected to bonded labour, sexual exploitation, and wage theft.

The borderless nature of cybercrime trafficking adds further complexity. Victims are not only moved physically but are also coaxed to become tools of crime through coercion, implicating them legally and socially upon rescue or escape. Criminal syndicates benefit from corruption, a lack of cross-border enforcement cooperation, and weak victim protection systems. Governments, such as those of Thailand and China, have initiated measures toward cross-border cooperation; however, broader regional cooperation remains limited.

Faith-based communities are in the best position to respond to this crisis due to their grassroots presence, trusted relationships, and moral leadership. Churches can serve as first responders to victims, safe havens for returnees, and advocates for systemic change. In collaboration with NGOs, governments, and international agencies, churches can help to amplify awareness, provide pastoral care, and lobby for ethical migration governance.

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), through its advocacy programme Asian Ecumenical Migrant Advocacy Network (AEMAN), has been engaged in providing a platform for churches and ecumenical organisations to raise awareness on critical issues of migration and human trafficking. Over the past several years, the ecumenical advocacy initiated by CCA has tried to promote advocacy at different levels to address the underlying factors that make individuals vulnerable to violence, abuse, and exploitation in the context of migration and human trafficking. The programme also emphasises the importance of advocacy to promote stronger legal frameworks, support services, and protective measures for individuals facing these risks.

The proposed international consultation is expected to address these issues, and in this regard, CCA will organise a Consultation with specific focus on the theme “Combatting Forced Migration, Human Trafficking, and Increased Cyber Crime in Asia”.

Thirty-five (35) representatives from CCA member churches and councils, together with experts dealing with forced migration, human trafficking, and cybersecurity issues, will attend the consultation, which will be held from 13 to 15 August, 2025, with arrivals on 12 August.

Objectives:

1. Deepen the knowledge of Asian churches and ecumenical organisations regarding the realities of human trafficking, particularly in South and Southeast Asia.
2. Develop action plans on how churches can actively contribute to addressing the challenges of human trafficking.
3. Build wider ecumenical networks in collaboration with civil society organisations, with the support of multilateral organisations, and initiate advocacy to combat forced migration, human trafficking, and increased cybercrime in Asia.