

## **Malaysia Backs Move To Stamp Out Modern Slavery**

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**From Abdul Muin Majid**

NEW YORK, Sept 21 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is on the same page with countries like Britain on the need to stamp out human trafficking and modern slavery, says Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

In this regard, he said Kuala Lumpur had proposed that Britain organise an international conference on modern day slavery during a round-table meeting of leaders, representatives of international organisations and experts convened by British Prime Minister Theresa May in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) here.

"There's a need for collective regional and international efforts to deal with the problem of human trafficking and modern slavery in an effective manner," he told Malaysian media Tuesday night.

Besides Ahmad Zahid, the meeting was attended by Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg, Slovakian President Andrej Kiska as well as relevant bodies and non-governmental organisations.

'Modern slavery', 'trafficking in persons' and 'human trafficking' have been used as umbrella terms for the act of recruiting, harbouring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for compelled labour or commercial sex acts through the use of force, fraud, or coercion.

Speaking ahead of the meeting in New York, May had said that across the world an estimated 45 million people were enduring experiences that were "simply horrifying in their inhumanity".

Besides establishing a task force, the British government has also earmarked some 33 million pounds from the United Kingdom aid budget to tackle modern slavery in high risk countries where victims are regularly trafficked to the UK.

Ahmad Zahid, who is also Home Minister, apprised the meeting of measures taken by Malaysia to deal with the issue, including through the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act (Atipsom) 2007 which came into force on Feb 28, 2008.

He noted that agencies tasked with implementing Atipsom handled 1,133 cases of human trafficking between 2008 and August 2016, and detained 1,861 people.

Over the same period, 141 cases had resulted in convictions, 33 of them in 2016. A total of 439 cases had gone to trial.

In a related development, Ahmad Zahid said efforts were also being made to extradite from Thailand, 10 people suspected of involvement in the 2015 discovery of mass graves containing the bodies of trafficked migrants at the Thai-Malaysian border.

On the side-lines of UNGA, Ahmad Zahid also met Australian Immigration and Border Protection Minister Peter Dutton and the United States' Susan Coppedge, ambassador-at-large to monitor and combat trafficking in persons and senior advisor to the Secretary of State.

On the meeting with Dutton, the deputy prime minister said Malaysia would send officials to Australia to see how both countries could cooperate in tackling refugee and migrant issues.

In talks with Coppedge, he said the American official lauded Malaysia's efforts in prosecuting those involved in human trafficking.

Commenting on the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted by world leaders attending the UNGA on Monday, Ahmad Zahid said it was timely, given the pressing issue of large-scale movements of such groups.

The Global Trends 2015 compiled by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) noted that 65.3 million people were displaced at the end of 2015, an increase of more than five million from 59.5 million a year earlier.

The tally comprised 21.3 million refugees, 3.2 million asylum seekers, and 40.8 million people internally displaced within their own countries.

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