

26 February 2018

The Hon. Mr Najib Razak
Prime Minister of Malaysia
Main Block, Perdana Putra Building,
Federal Government Administrative Centre, 62502 Putrajaya
MALAYSIA

Dear Hon. Prime Minister Najib Razak,

We are writing to you from the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), a network of more than 320 civil society organisations and individuals from 28 countries committed to advancing the rights of refugees across the Asia Pacific region.

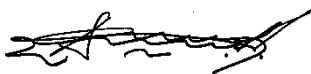
As a network committed to refugee protection across the region, we urge the Malaysia Government to allow the 11 Uyghur Muslims currently detained by Malaysian authorities immediate access to the UNHCR to enable them to determine their eligibility for international protection. APRRN is especially concerned about reports regarding the potential forced return of these men to the People's Republic of China and would like to remind Malaysia of its obligations to the non-derogable principle of non-refoulement i.e. not sending someone back to a country where they may face a risk of persecution, which Malaysia has publicly affirmed its compliance to on numerous occasions.

As you are no doubt aware, the 11 Uyghur men are reportedly part of a larger group of 20 who escaped from an immigration detention centre in Sadao, Thailand in November 2017. The Uyghurs, a Turkic Muslim minority that predominately reside in Western China's Xinjiang Province, have faced increasing ethnic and religious discrimination over recent years. Reports from organisations such as Human Rights Watch show an increase in arbitrary police raids on Uyghur households, unexplained deaths, and routine restrictions on religious practices such as the observation of Ramadan.

APRRN recognises Malaysia's role in providing temporary protection to hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced people for many years. We also applaud Malaysia for their recent pilot program offering work to over 300 Rohingya refugees. However, APRRN is deeply concerned about the present situation, particularly given that Malaysia has previously handed a group of Uyghur men to Chinese authorities despite the fact they had registered with UNHCR and had a pending refugee status determination. If forcibly returned to China, this current group of 11 Uyghur men will very likely face severe persecution and possibly death upon return.

Under customary international law, Malaysia has an obligation not to return individuals to countries to where they might be subject to persecution or torture. APRRN calls upon the Prime Minister to immediately ensure these men are not returned to danger, and that the Malaysian Government fully cooperates with the UNHCR to allow these men access to refugee status determination process.

Sincerely,



Yiombi Thona
Chair
Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)