

For immediate release

Despite Global Refugee Crisis, Japan Accepts Only 20 Refugees in 2017

Bangkok, 16 February 2018, 14:30: On 13 February 2018, Japan's Ministry of Justice released a preliminary press release of their asylum processing statistics for 2017. These figures revealed an astounding 99.9% rejection rate of all applications.

Over the course of 2017, despite 19,628 persons submitting asylum applications, the Japanese government only conferred refugee status to a total of 20 persons. A handful of other applicants were granted a form of 'humanitarian status', allowing them to legally remain in Japan, but even this form of protection was less than half of the number granted last year. Appeal also offered refugees little hope, with only 1 of the 20 successful cases being granted this way. This means that Japan's official 2017 refugee recognition rate was 0.1% - one of the lowest recognition rates in the developed world. Eri Ishikawa, Chair of the Board of the Tokyo-based Japan Association for Refugees (JAR) claims that, "the government of Japan must urgently revise the RSD system and introduce a comprehensive refugee protection policy, that also addresses social integration."

The Japanese Government maintains that such low recognition rates is due to the high numbers of people applying for refugee status who do not have a genuine protection claim. However, civil society groups such as JAR highlight that even some of the world's most persecuted minorities, including the Rohingya, routinely find their cases for refugee status rejected.

For some time the Japanese Government has claimed that many asylum seekers come to Japan without any protection concerns, instead using the process as a guise to stay in the country and work. Brian Barbour, Regional Protection Chair of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) stated that, "Even if this is true for part of the applicant pool, this highlights a huge failure of Japan's asylum system to process cases efficiently and fairly." In addition he states that "the more important truth is that refugees are being rejected. For those who are not abusing the system, the system is abusing them."

Yiombi Thona a refugee based in Korea and the Chair of APRRN expressed grave concerns over the recent figures. "Sadly these shocking statistics are not new. They are consistent year to year and provide evidence of a long-standing Japan government policy of rejection."

In 2016, the Japanese Government joined the New York Declaration committing to a 'shared responsibility to manage large movements of refugees and migrants in a humane, sensitive, compassionate and people-centred manner.' Such a public commitment by the Japanese Government appears at odds with the current system in Japan – a system that rejects 99.9% of applications and has done so for a number of years.

Brian Barbour notes that "Even when persons are granted asylum in Japan, it is usually years before the final result is given. By the time it comes, the refugee is so marginalized, that the feeling is bittersweet. For those who are rejected, feelings of desperation and hopelessness prevail."

About APRRN:

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network is a network of over 320 civil society organisations and individuals from 28 countries in the Asia Pacific region committed to advancing the rights of refugees, through joint advocacy, capacity-strengthening, resource sharing and outreach.

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