

PRESS RELEASE

**Teenage Somali refugee with Downs Syndrome held
in Thai immigration detention despite clear medical risk**

[BANGKOK, 3 April 2019] The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) is deeply concerned by the continued detention of a UNHCR recognised refugee minor from Somalia who suffers from Downs Syndrome. Thirteen-year-old Hamza Abdulrashid has been held for over five months at the Suan Plu Immigration Detention Center in Bangkok. He has not had access to necessary specialised medical care in conditions that pose significant risk to his health, and potentially to his life.

Abdulrashid, who requires daily assistance with basic functions, including eating and dressing, is detained according to orders by Thai immigration authorities. He is being held alongside his caregiver and elder brother, Omar Ahmed Abdullahi, aged 22 years. This is despite their recognised refugee status under UNHCR mandate and adherence to regular reporting requirements. While Abdulrashid entered detention due to necessity of care by his brother, rather than on the orders of Thai authorities, Thailand is a signatory to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and is therefore obliged under international law to facilitate the best interests of the minor, including release from detention and respect for family unity. Additional international protections exist regarding the detention of high-risk individuals, and Thailand has recently publicly committed itself to adherence to international standards, including disallowing the of detention of minors.

APRRN Secretary General Themba Lewis responded stating, “it is unconscionable that Thai authorities would maintain that the detention of the child’s caregiver is warranted, given the clear risks this poses to the child. Proportionality arguments fail. APRRN calls on the Thai authorities to respect their commitments and immediately release Omar Abdullahi and the child under his care. This is not just a case of a child being detained, illegal in its own right, this is a child facing serious risk and in need of immediate and regular care that is not available to him in detention.”

Sunai Phasuk, Senior Researcher for Thailand at Human Rights Watch reinforced the sentiment, stating that by “depriving [Abdulrashid] of access to necessary healthcare, the Thai government is exposing him to possible serious illness or even death.”

People with Downs Syndrome suffer innumerable and severe health risks, including immune system deficiencies that may lead to serious and life-threatening illness, seizures, heart problems, and a number of related risks.

APRRN continues to dedicate itself to working closely with governments, affected populations, civil society, and NGOs to further strengthen protection and ensure rights for refugees in the region.

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) is a network of 350 civil society organisations and individuals from 28 countries committed to advancing the rights of refugees in the Asia Pacific region. APRRN aims to advance the rights of refugees and other people in need of protection through joint advocacy, capacity strengthening, resource sharing and outreach.

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