

For immediate release

Malaysia Returns UNHCR-recognised Refugee to Turkey Despite Serious Protection Concerns

Bangkok, 2 September 2019, 08:00: The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) strongly condemns the Malaysian Government for the recent return of refugee Arif Komis and his family to Turkey. The Komis family holds UNHCR cards that demonstrate they had claimed asylum in Malaysia. Reports from activists and Malaysian authorities indicate that Arif and his family were forcibly repatriated to Turkey on 29 August 2019, despite this action flagrantly breaching national and international laws.

Komis, who was working as a chemistry teacher at a local international school, his wife, and their four daughters were reportedly taken from their home in Kuala Lumpur on the evening of August 28 by men believed to be Malaysian police. A message from one of the daughters, sent to friends and relatives, indicated they were being held by the immigration department and were scheduled for deportation to Turkey on August 29. Komis' school has been accused of being affiliated with the opposition Gulenist movement, considered a "terror group" by the Turkish government, and accused of masterminding a failed 2016 coup attempt.

Najeeba Wazefadost, former refugee and current Chair of APRRN's Refugee Leadership and Participation Working Group, referred to the deportation as "a disappointing day for refugee protection Malaysia." In addition, she stated, "Malaysia should protect all refugees within their territory, regardless of what their country of origin may be. Politics should never triumph over protection."

The deportation of Arif and his family is sadly not the first case where the Malaysian government has capitulated to the political pressure of foreign governments and returned a refugee to an uncertain future in their home country. In May 2019, Malaysian authorities arrested Thai activist Praphan Pipithnamporn at the request of Thai authorities. Despite being a UNHCR card holder, she was repatriated, an act described at the time by Malaysian authorities as 'simply doing their duty as a 'good neighbour'.

Despite not being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, Malaysia is obligated to adhere to the globally recognised principle of *non-refoulement*: protection from return for any individual at risk of persecution. The return of Arif and his family to Turkey is a blatant violation of this underlying principle and severely calls into question the Malaysian Government's commitment to improving Malaysia's patchy record on refugee protection. APRRN's Programme Coordinator Evan Jones notes that "Arif and his family will almost certainly face persecution by Turkish authorities upon arrival. As a UNHCR card holder, Arif should never have been subject to such action, a clear violation of his human rights."

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) is a network of 400 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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