

**For immediate release**

**PRESS RELEASE:  
REGIONAL RESPONSE NEEDED AS BANGLADESH REFUSES ROHINGYA  
REFUGEES**

*BANGKOK, 24 April 2020:* The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) expresses great concern regarding reports that Bangladesh has become the latest government to deny disembarkation to Rohingya refugees arriving by boat. Bangladesh, as with all states, is obligated under customary international law to adhere to the principle of *non-refoulement*: protection from return for any individual at risk of persecution. A comprehensive and coordinated regional response must be enacted immediately to ensure Rohingya refugees at sea are provided life-saving access to asylum and that no more lives are lost.

On 22 April, the Bangladesh Navy and Coast Guard reportedly prevented two boats carrying an estimated 500 Rohingya refugees from disembarking and seeking asylum in Bangladesh. Dr. Momen, Bangladesh's Foreign Minister, was quoted in the media, "*Two boats carrying Rohingya are trying to enter into our waters. Our navy and coast guard are on alert and they have been instructed not to allow these boats to enter Bangladesh.*" This follows a similar move by Malaysian authorities on 16 April, when a fishing trawler carrying approximately 200 Rohingya refugees was prevented from entering Malaysian territory. This is a reversal of recent commendable actions by both governments which had recently rescued refugee boats and provided humanitarian assistance to Rohingya refugees.

*"Rohingya lives are being threatened, not only at sea but also on land,"* APRRN Secretary General, Themba Lewis, stated. *"Bangladesh has traditionally shown an exemplary approach in providing access and assistance to Rohingya refugees, and it is essential that the fundamental right to seek asylum, whether in Malaysia, Bangladesh, or any other state, is upheld—especially in trying times."*

Bangladesh and Malaysia alone cannot rescue and provide protection for Rohingya refugees at sea. A comprehensive regional response to conduct lifesaving search and rescue missions, disembarkation, and provision of humanitarian assistance must be initiated immediately. Following the 2015 Andaman Sea Crisis, the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime (Bali Process) created a Consultation Mechanism and a Task Force on Planning and Preparedness to address future emergency situations involving migration. APRRN calls on Australia and Indonesia as Co-Chairs of the Bali Process to utilise the Consultation Mechanism to immediately convene meetings with Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, and Malaysia to develop a collective response to the current boat crisis.

Until the root causes that lead to the forced displacement of Rohingya are addressed, onward movements of Rohingya will continue. Nearly three years since the mass exodus of Rohingya from Myanmar due to military violence, little progress has been made towards creating conducive conditions in Rakhine. In January 2020, the International Court of Justice ordered Myanmar to take measures to prevent genocide of Rohingya. At the same time, the ongoing civil war between the military and Arakan Army has escalated, leading to increased internal displacement and civilian casualties. The civil war, continuous denial of rights, increased restrictions on humanitarian aid, and restrictions in mobile internet communications make sustainable repatriation of refugees impossible. As ASEAN Member States are most affected by the displacement of Rohingya, ASEAN must task Myanmar to take on its role in creating

an ongoing regional refugee crisis. It is high time that Myanmar takes responsibility and works towards improving conditions for all communities in Rakhine State, including an end to conflict, provision of citizenship, and fulfilment of basic human rights.

**APRRN strongly urges all states within the region to:**

- Respect international obligations regarding the principle of *non-refoulement*
- Cease 'pushbacks', interception, and other measures designed to obstruct access to territory
- Deploy immediate life-saving search and rescue missions and provide humanitarian assistance and medical treatment where required
- Ensure a safe and transparent process for asylum seekers and refugees within their territories and access to UNHCR
- Activate mechanisms under the Bali Process to develop a comprehensive and coordinated response to the crisis.
- Call on Myanmar to improve conditions to enable safe, voluntary, and sustainable repatriation of refugees

**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.

**Media Contact**

Janeen Sawatzky, Programme Coordinator, APRRN

**Tel:** +66 (0) 98 252 5102 **Email:** [janeen@aprrn.info](mailto:janeen@aprrn.info) **Fax:** +66 2 234 2679

Themba Lewis, Secretary General, APRRN

**Tel:** +66 (0) 99 481 1595 **Email:** [themba@aprrn.info](mailto:themba@aprrn.info) **Fax:** +66 2 234 2679