



Bangladesh-Myanmar: Honoring Resilience, Reaffirming Commitment to Refugee Rights on World Refugee Day

Bangkok, Thailand, 20 June 2024 – Over the past three years, the crisis in Myanmar, triggered by the military coup in February 2021, has continued to worsen. This displacement crisis, further compounded by the plight of Rohingya refugees who fled to Bangladesh and neighboring Asian countries six years ago, highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive regional response to address the root causes of the crisis and provide essential support to those affected.

In Myanmar, the number of conflict-related displacement continues to increase, with approximately 2.6 million people having to flee their homes as of mid-December 2023, including 306,200 people in situations of protracted displacement from before 2021¹. The recent escalation of conflict in Shan, Rakhine, Northwest and Southeast has led to the displacement of an estimated 628,000 individuals between October and December 2023 alone.²

AJAR continues to work with refugees who cannot return to their homes due to violent conflict or fear of persecution for their beliefs and identities. We have been working with our Burmese partners for the past decade, participating in a collaborative program focused on gender-based human rights violations. After the coup where conflict has intensified in ethnic areas that have seen decades of war, now approximately one in four Myanmar nationals are now migrants – internally or internationally – and migration flows have increased rapidly since the end of pandemic-related restrictions in 2022.³ Amidst the displacement, to this day AJAR continues to support initiatives, driven by survivors and civil society, to push for accountability and justice.

In parallel, following a military crackdown in Rakhine State in Myanmar in 2017, we continue to support Rohingya communities in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Using participatory action research methodology, Rohingya men and women can access psycho-social help with learning and empowerment, women participants learn facilitation skills, basic principles of human rights, as well as healing and peer support techniques.

This World Refugee Day serves as an opportunity to highlight not only discussing ways to help refugees and displaced people but also reflecting on the lived experiences of displacement. It requires imagining a sudden exchange of lives, acknowledging the terror and loss experienced by millions forced to flee their homes, jobs, and countries – all displaced and dispossessed.

This day serves as a reminder to honor the courage of refugees throughout the region and stand in solidarity with them. We saw various international and regional mechanisms set in motion, whereas in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN 5-point Consensus, intended to address the Myanmar crisis, has failed to yield significant improvements due to its lack of time constraints, sanction mechanisms, and the military junta's non-compliance. Three years without significant improvement, ASEAN must discuss a scenario beyond the 5-Point Consensus on Myanmar with a view to develop an alternative plan with clear benchmarks and time-bound indication for success. This must include a schedule of progressive sanctions in the event of the junta's escalation of violence. ASEAN also must engage with the NUG and the NUCC as the legitimate representatives of the Myanmar government to find a comprehensive and holistic resolution for the human rights crisis in Myanmar.

None of the countries that became the target of displaced Burmese and Rohingya people to live have ratified the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol, which brings the uncertain situation and lack of legal protection towards the refugees in the third countries. In Malaysia, the government is no longer accepting refugees coming into the country after

¹ [Myanmar: Intensification of Clashes Flash Update #10 \(as of 15 December 2023\) \[EN/MY\] - Myanmar | ReliefWeb](#)

² [Myanmar Humanitarian Update No. 35 | 2023 Year in Review - Myanmar | ReliefWeb](#)

³ [Myanmar Crisis Response Plan 2024 | Global Crisis Response Platform \(iom.int\)](#)

2020.⁴ While in Indonesia, massive rejection to the Rohingya refugees who entered the country began after the latest waves of their arrivals in Aceh, starting in November 2023 until now, and getting worse because of the misinformation and hoaxes against the Rohingya refugees spread through social media. The situation was further aggravated by a tragic incident in March 2024 when three dead bodies, suspected to be Rohingya refugees, were found floating near Lhok Rigaih beach in Aceh.⁵ The governments of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the international community must make efforts to support the hundreds of thousands of displaced Burmese and Rohingya people in securing their fundamental human rights and justice.

The declining international support for refugees in camps and the increasing number of lives lost at sea are deeply concerning. A renewed global commitment is crucial to ensure the safety, dignity, and well-being of all those affected by this crisis. The plight of these refugees, including those who have found sanctuary in Thailand, reminds us of the urgent need for solidarity, compassion, and decisive action to address the root causes of displacement and to support those who have been forced to leave everything behind. It is important to ensure that refugees are recognised and acknowledged by the ASEAN member states as refugees under international law, so they are able to have access to legal protections and assistance.

AJAR remains steadfast in its commitment to amplifying the voices of refugees, raising awareness about their plight, and working towards sustainable solutions. We believe that justice, accountability, and compassion are essential in building a future where everyone can live in peace, dignity, and security.

Today, we honor the resilience and courage of refugees from Myanmar and around the world. We call for renewed commitment and urgent action to address the root causes of displacement and to support those affected by this ongoing crisis.

⁴ Rozanna Latiff, "Malaysia can't take any more Rohingya refugees, PM says," *Reuters* (Kuala Lumpur), 26 June 2020, accessed 18 June 2024, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN23X1A5/>>

⁵ Radhiyya Indra, "Bodies of Three Rohingya Refugees Found at Sea", *The Jakarta Post*, 24 March 2024, accessed 18 June 2024, <<https://www.thejakartapost.com/indonesia/2024/03/24/bodies-of-three-rohingya-refugees-found-at-sea.html>>