

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

20 June 2023 ASA 16/6897/2023

# WORLD REFUGEE DAY: REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS MUST SCALE UP SUPPORT

This World Refugee Day, Amnesty International is calling on the governments of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Myanmar military and the international community to make efforts to support the hundreds of thousands of displaced Rohingya people in securing their fundamental human rights and justice. The situation has worsened substantially since the last World Refugee Day, with diminishing international support for those living in refugee camps and an increase in people lost and dying at sea.

Myanmar's military has conducted an extensive campaign of repression and violence against the Rohingya people in the country's northern Rakhine State for decades. In 2017, the Myanmar military carried out a relentless campaign of ethnic cleansing against them through widespread unlawful killing, including of young children; rape and other sexual violence, forced starvation; and the systematic burning of hundreds of Rohingya villages. As a result, around one million Rohingya people were forced to flee into neighbouring Bangladesh – creating one of the largest refugee camps in the world. They joined thousands of other Rohingya people in Bangladesh who had previously fled violence and repression in Myanmar in previous decades. About 148,000 Rohingya people are now internally displaced in Rakhine State and are forced to live in dehumanizing conditions. They, along with hundreds of thousands of other Rohingya across Rakhine State, have been and continue to be subjected to an institutionalized system of segregation and discrimination that Amnesty International has determined constitutes the crime of apartheid. After Cyclone Mocha decimated parts of western Myanmar, the Myanmar military failed to take necessary measures to mitigate the impact, leading to a significant but preventable loss of life among the Rohingya population.<sup>1</sup>

Those in Bangladesh continue living in camps where conditions are poor and the risks of fire, violence, and natural disaster are substantial. Earlier this month, the UN World Food Programme in Bangladesh had to further slash monthly rations to Rohingyas from \$10 to \$8 (amounting to 27 cents a day) due to an acute funding shortfall.<sup>2</sup> Their rights to freedom of movement, access to information, health and adequate housing are violated while education and employment opportunities are few. This is in addition to refugees being subjected to extrajudicial executions.<sup>3</sup> The prospect of involuntary relocation to a more dangerous and isolated "island" and deteriorating living conditions in the camps have left some refugees demanding to be sent back to Myanmar without any protection measures in place back in their home country. These conditions also lead many Rohingya people to undertake dangerous journeys to other countries by land and sea, including Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Those who embark on these dangerous boat journeys often put their lives at great risk leading to hundreds of people stranded and hundreds losing their lives at sea. In December 2022, Amnesty International issued a response to the reports of at least one boat stranded in the Andaman Sea, carrying around 119 people.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, Myanmar: Military Authorities Exacerbate the Suffering Caused by Cyclone Mocha, 14 June 2023, [amnesty.org/en/documents/asa16/6875/2023/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa16/6875/2023/en/)

<sup>2</sup> UN News, UN in Bangladesh announces devastating new round of rations cuts for Rohingya refugees, 01 June 2023, [news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1137252](https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1137252)

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, Bangladesh: Let us speak for our rights: Human rights situation of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, 15 September 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/asa13/2884/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa13/2884/2020/en/)

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International, Southeast Asian governments must provide care, refuge for Rohingya stranded at sea, 9 December 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/12/rohingya-refugees-stranded-sea/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/12/rohingya-refugees-stranded-sea/)

In general, states and international organizations have so far failed to adequately support the Rohingya people, while the Myanmar military continues to implement its campaign of violence, oppression and forced displacement with near total impunity.

This World Refugee Day serves as an opportunity to highlight the ongoing challenges faced by Rohingya refugees throughout the region. It is also a reminder to the international community at the regional and international level that Rohingya communities still face grave hardships and atrocities at the hands of the Myanmar military. Meaningful international assistance is needed to alleviate this suffering and to find a lasting solution that respects people's dignity, safety and rights. In this context, Amnesty International makes the following calls:

### **TO INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:**

- Ensure Rohingya refugees' and asylum seekers' active participation in decision-making processes, with transparent, rights-respecting policy frameworks.

### **TO THE MYANMAR MILITARY:**

- Immediately lift all restrictions on freedom of movement along with other discriminatory practices and regulations, and stop persecuting Rohingya people for exercising their right to move freely;
- Halt the discriminatory citizenship "verification process", and ensure that any future efforts or procedures to determine the citizenship status of any person in Myanmar is conducted in a manner which complies with international human rights law and standards, and in particular is non-discriminatory and does not render the individual in question stateless;
- Respect, protect and fulfil the right of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and other states to return to Myanmar and ensure that any determination of the citizenship status of Rohingya refugees is implemented in accordance with human rights law and standards, in particular in a non-discriminatory manner and that the burden of proof does not fall on the refugees.

### **TO THE BANGLADESH AUTHORITIES:**

- Take greater steps to ensure the safety and dignity of Rohingya people in camps, with access to clean water, appropriate and safe housing, healthcare and effective protection measures to prevent further harm, especially in relation to fires and other commonly occurring natural disasters;
- Respect the principle of non-refoulement by ensuring that Rohingya refugees are not transferred to any place, including their country of origin, where they may be at risk of serious human rights abuses and violations;
- Ensure that journalists, representatives of the UN, civil society organizations, including donor and humanitarian agencies and human rights organizations, have unfettered access to all refugee settlements, to independently assess conditions;
- Ensure Rohingya children have access to education.

### **TO AUTHORITIES IN TRANSIT AND DESTINATION COUNTRIES, INCLUDING INDONESIA, MALAYSIA AND THAILAND:**

- Bolster capacity and actions to prevent the loss of life at sea, including patrols to search for boats, increase response and coordination on search and rescue in emergency situations, and address the humanitarian needs of people at sea;
- Institute official disembarkation procedures to ensure individuals arriving by sea are able to seek humanitarian assistance and protection from persecution;
- Respect the principle of non-refoulement, given the high risk of serious human rights violations, including torture and other ill-treatment, to anyone who might be sent back from transit or destination countries to the custody of the Myanmar military;

- Ensure that special populations such as survivors of trafficking and refugees are accorded requisite protections in international law. Ensure that children are never detained, and that families are not separated through detaining adult caregivers.

### **TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:**

- Increase provision of aid to Bangladesh to support the hundreds of thousands of people living in camps;
- Ensure safe and legal pathways are available to Rohingya refugees, in particular offering resettlement places for those who meet UNHCR's vulnerability criteria as well as complementary pathways such as community sponsorship;
- Take further steps to ensure that Myanmar authorities are held accountable for crimes against humanity and its responsibility to ensure safe return of Rohingya refugees, including dismantling the continuing apartheid system in Myanmar;
- Exercise universal and other forms of jurisdiction to investigate any person who may reasonably be suspected of committing crimes against humanity, war crimes or other crimes under international law in Myanmar. Where there is sufficient admissible evidence, prosecute the suspect in proceedings that meet international standards of fairness and that do not involve seeking or imposing the death penalty, or extradite the suspect to a jurisdiction that will do so.

### **TO THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY:**

- Re-establish the Special Committee against Apartheid, which was originally established under UN General Assembly Resolution 1761 (XVII) of 6 November 1962, to focus on all situations, including Myanmar, where the serious human rights violation and crime against humanity of apartheid are being committed and to bring pressure on those responsible to disestablish these systems of oppression and domination.