

URGENT ACTION

MORE THAN 400 ROHINGYA PEOPLE STRANDED AT SEA

As many as 400 Rohingya refugees are believed to be stranded at sea, with dozens of deaths having already been recorded. Fleeing violence in their home state, South and Southeast Asian governments are using COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions to block them from landing safely and seeking asylum. The Indonesian Government, as co-chair to the 2016 Bali Process, has a responsibility to manage a regional response to this crisis and co-ordinate search and rescue operations to locate and assist boats in distress, in line with regional declarations and international law.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

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Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my grave concern about the several hundred Rohingya women, men and children who have been stranded at sea for weeks or possibly months. These people fled their homes in Myanmar's northern Rakhine State after the military unleashed a brutal campaign of violence against them, and governments from across the region have been invoking COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions to deny them permission to disembark.

It is alarming to learn that dozens of lives have already been lost at sea, and that there have been reports that those who have been allowed to disembark, are severely malnourished and dehydrated. According to information obtained by Amnesty International, as many as up to 400 refugees are still believed to be at sea.

As you are aware, Ministers involved the Bali Process committed to a comprehensive regional approach to ensure safety and protection for refugees and migrants in March 2016. As the co-chair of the Bali process, the Indonesian Government plays a key role in responding to this crisis and ensuring that no more lives are tragically lost.

I find this situation troubling as it revives distressing memories of the 2015 Andaman Sea crisis, when an untold number of Rohingya people were not rescued and hundreds lost their lives. This failed response to a humanitarian crisis cannot be repeated year on year.

Therefore, I urge your government:

- ***To Immediately call for an emergency meeting to co-ordinate search and rescue operations to locate and assist boats in distress, in line with regional declarations and international law;***
- ***To work together with governments in the region to refrain from pushing back boats to the sea, and allow all boats carrying refugees and migrants to land safely in the nearest country;***
- ***Along with neighbouring countries (particularly Malaysia and Thailand) to prioritize the immediate humanitarian needs of refugees and migrants including adequate food, water, shelter and health care, according to the Presidential Regulation 125/2016 when the boats enter Indonesian waters***

Yours Sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since August 2017, more than 740,000 Rohingya have fled their homes in Myanmar's northern Rakhine State after the military unleashed a [brutal campaign of violence](#) against them. A UN report has concluded these crimes may also constitute genocide. In the years after the campaign, Rohingya have continued to flee across the border.

For years, the Rohingya have made attempts to reach Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and other countries. Lacking visas, travel documents and subject to strict restrictions on movement that make overland connections nearly impossible, boats are often the only option.

According to information obtained by Amnesty International, several hundred people are still believed to be at sea. In May 2020, dozens of lives were reportedly lost on a boat the Malaysian authorities turned away. The survivors, allowed to disembark in Bangladesh, were severely malnourished and dehydrated. In the most recent weeks in June, while initially accepting boats at sea, Malaysia and Bangladesh are now refusing to offer assistance to people in need of rescue. Moreover, coastguards have pushed back these vessels. Other countries have not responded.

South and Southeast Asian governments must immediately launch search and rescue operations for Rohingya stranded at sea, bringing food, medicine and allowing safe disembarkation. Authorities must not forcibly push boats back. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic should not be an excuse to block Rohingya from landing safely and seeking asylum.

Governments must also uphold commitments made under regional declarations, including the 2010 ASEAN Declaration on search and rescue operations at sea, the 2016 Bali Declaration, and the outcome of the February 2020 meeting of the Taskforce on the Bali Process, which "emphasized the primacy of saving lives at sea and not endangering the life and safety of persons in responding to irregular maritime migration."

Despite being a non-State Party to the 1951 Convention, Indonesia plays a key role as being the co-chair of Bali Process with Australia. In 2016, Indonesia also issued a Presidential Regulation No. 125/2016 on the Handling of Foreign Refugees. In addition, Indonesia has a special Task Force on the Handling of Refugees (*Satuan Tugas Penanganan Pengungsi dari Luar Negeri*) under the Coordinating Ministry of Political, Legal and Security Affairs that is in coordination with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Indonesia.

The international community must also do much more to support Bangladesh and share the responsibility and financial burden of hosting almost a million refugees at a time its economy is already under strain from the pandemic-related global slowdown. Finally, Rohingya refugees are entitled to continue to seek asylum and states must keep borders open to people who continue to flee now or will do so in the future.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: [Bahasa Indonesia, English]

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: [31 July 2020]

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: [Group] (They/Them)