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ASEAN members must ratify UN refugee and migrant Conventions

Amnesty International today called on all member states of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to ratify two key UN Conventions protecting the rights of refugees and migrant workers.

The appeal came ahead of an ASEAN foreign ministers summit today in Vientiane, Laos and amidst mounting evidence of wide ranging human rights violations affecting refugees and migrant workers in South East Asia.

"Hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrant workers in South East Asia have suffered serious human rights violations including cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, forced return, and imprisonment without trial. Prompt ratification of the UN conventions by all ASEAN member states would provide a clear signal that such violations are totally unacceptable," said Purna Sen - Asia-Pacific Program Director of Amnesty International.

Amnesty International is calling on ASEAN members to ratify the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and the UN International Convention on the Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

The organisation is particularly concerned about the situation in Thailand, Malaysia and Cambodia.

In **Thailand**, asylum-seekers and migrant workers have suffered widespread human rights violations, especially those from Myanmar and from the Hmong ethnic minority in Laos. These include forcible return or threat of forcible return; ill-treatment and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in immigration detention centres; and unsafe working and living conditions for migrant workers, some of whom are asylum-seekers. Earlier this month, the government threatened forcibly to return over 6000 Hmong asylum-seekers who were evicted from temporary shelters leaving them without shelter, proper food or sanitation. This decision was later reversed, but their future is uncertain and concerns remain that those affected are not receiving adequate assistance.

In **Malaysia**, refugees and migrant workers, including children, have been held in detention camps in conditions amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Amnesty International is also concerned about those charged under the Immigration Act, denied the right to a fair trial, and sentenced to imprisonment and whipping. Most recently 68 refugees from Myanmar were arrested in front of the Myanmar Embassy in Kuala Lumpur after staging a peaceful protest demonstration and remain in detention.

In **Cambodia**, the government has persistently failed to respect fully its international obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Since 2001 hundreds of ethnic minority Montagnard people seeking asylum in Cambodia have been forcibly returned to Viet Nam where they faced persecution by the authorities.

Background

ASEAN member states are Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Cambodia, Viet Nam, Laos, Myanmar.

Each July, ASEAN member states hold a series of meetings on a rotating basis, which includes the Ministerial Meeting, bringing together all 10 ASEAN Foreign Ministers; and the Post Ministerial Meeting, including all ASEAN Foreign Ministers; the EU Presidency representative (currently the United Kingdom); a State Department representative from the US Government; and the South Korean, Chinese, and Japanese Foreign Ministers.

The governments of Cambodia and Indonesia have already signed the UN Convention on migrant workers and the Philippines government has ratified it. Cambodia has also ratified the UN Convention on Refugees.

Public Document

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