

May 22, 2014

ASEAN, international community must prioritise Rohingya women and children in crisis

The Women Peace Network - Arakan (WPN-A) urgently calls upon the international community, including ASEAN governments, to act immediately to save and protect the Rohingya women and children who are currently trapped at sea. WPN-A also calls for urgent action to address the root causes of the humanitarian disaster faced by Rohingya women within Myanmar and in the region, and demands a halt to discriminatory policies and practices by the government of Myanmar.

Rohingya women and children have traditionally been vulnerable to discrimination, human rights violations and severe deprivation. The intensified threats since the anti-Rohingya violence of 2012 have put them in an even more desperate situation. This is evidenced by the increasing number of women and children who are compelled to risk their lives to flee Rakhine State in unseaworthy boats without any guarantee of safety or means of survival. Before 2012, it was extremely rare to see women and children amongst Rohingya boatpeople. Since then, there has been a significant rise: at least 20% of the people currently stranded in the Malacca Straits are women and children.

These women and children have been driven to desperation because of the inhumane conditions they face in IDP camps and other parts of Rakhine State, where they remain under segregation. In April, Rakhine State authorities announced they had confiscated over 300,000 temporary IDs, depriving their owners of access to most basic services. Rohingya children face several forms of deprivation, including being denied birth certificates since 2012 and having limited access to education.

The Myanmar government has escalated this humanitarian crisis via increasingly restrictive policies, practices and legislation. For decades, authorities have committed violence targeting Rohingya and other Muslim minorities, including widespread sexual violence against Rohingya women and girls. The government has gone further in fuelling religious intolerance and discrimination through the introduction of the controversial 'National Race and Religion Protection' bills, which, if signed into law, will restrict religious, marital, and reproductive freedoms.

The Myanmar authorities' denial of Rohingya citizenship and identity, as well their active involvement in trafficking Rohingya people, is the root cause of this humanitarian disaster.

We call on ASEAN governments and the international community to demand that the Myanmar government fulfill their responsibility to protect. We also call on the Myanmar government to comply with various women, peace and security resolutions, including UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Myanmar also has obligations through the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), both of which it is party.

We urge the ASEAN governments and the international community to act swiftly to address the growing humanitarian crisis unfolding in the Southeast Asian seas to prevent further unnecessary loss of life and suffering.

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About Women Peace Network – Arakan (WPN-A)

Founded in 2012 by former political prisoner and Rohingya activist Wai Wai Nu, WPN-A is involved in peace engagement in Arakan State, offers political empowerment training targeting youth from different religious and ethnic backgrounds, focusing on diversity and tolerance.

Signatories:

1. Active Citizenship Foundation of the Philippines
2. Ain O Salish Kendra, Bangladesh
3. Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma, Thailand
4. American Jewish World Service , USA
5. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights
6. Asia Justice and Rights, Indonesia
7. Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Australia
8. Asian Circle 1325, Philippines
9. Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters, Myanmar
10. Association of War Affected Women in Sri Lanka
11. Autonomy Foundation, Poland
12. Banteay Srei, Cambodia
13. Buku's Gender, Sexuality and Human Rights Classroom, Thailand
14. Burma Action Ireland
15. Burma Campaign UK
16. Burma Partnership
17. Burma Rohingya Organization UK
18. Burma-Initiative, Stiftung Asienhaus , Germany
19. Center for Community and Development, Indonesia
20. Channel Foundation, USA
21. Charles Hector, Malaysia
22. Christian Solidarity Worldwide, UK
23. Equality Myanmar
24. Free Burma Campaign South Africa
25. Genocide Alert, Germany
26. Genocide Watch, USA
27. Global Centre for Responsibility to Protect, USA
28. Global Justice Center, USA
29. Global Network for Reproductive Rights, Philippines
30. Human Rights Institute of South Africa
31. Info Birmanie France
32. Insan Foundation Trust, Pakistan
33. International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect, USA
34. Kachin Peace Network, Myanmar
35. Kishwar Sultana, Pakistan
36. Knights for Peace, International, Philippines

37. Malaysians Against Death Penalty and Torture
38. Nagorik Uddyog (Citizen's Initiative for Human Rights), Bangladesh
39. Network for Democracy & Development, Burma
40. Other Space Foundation/Projekt Birma, Poland
41. Peace Institute of Cambodia
42. People's Empowerment Foundation Thailand
43. Pergerakan Indonesia
44. Research for Social Advancement of Malaysia
45. Rohingya Community Ireland
46. Society for Appraisal & Women Empowerment in Rural Areas, Pakistan
47. South Asia Forum for Human Rights, India
48. TENAGANITA Women's Force, Malaysia
49. The Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies - Concordia University, Canada
50. Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, USA
51. UnYPhil-Women, Philippines
52. Urgent Action Funds for Women's Human Rights , USA
53. US Campaign for Burma
54. Vietnam Committee for Human Rights, France
55. VIVAT – International, Indonesia
56. William Nicholas Gomez , UK
57. Women in Governance, India
58. Yayasan Mandiri Kreatif Indonesia
59. Yayasan Transformasi Lepra Indonesia
60. Youth for Peace Cambodia