

Joint NGO Statement ahead of the Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean, Bangkok, 29 May 2015

STATEMENT RELEASED ON 27 MAY 2015

Please find herein the Joint NGO Statement ahead of the intergovernmental Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean being held on 29 May 2015 hosted by the Royal Thai Government in Bangkok. The signatories below represent more than 600 non-governmental and civil society organisations operating across Asia and the Pacific regions.

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We the undersigned welcome the decision of the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand to provide temporary shelter and protection to refugees and migrants rescued at sea as a step in the right direction.

We acknowledge that Thailand has called for a Special Meeting on Irregular Migration, on the 29th of May 2015 with 17 states invited to attend. We are hopeful that the meeting will pave the way for longer term, sustainable and durable solutions to address the irregular movements by sea from those seeking to escape poverty and/or persecution.

We are encouraged by announcements of the Indonesian, Malaysian, and Myanmar governments that search and rescue operations will be conducted to locate and rescue people in boats still at sea. We urge other governments to follow suit in conducting their own search and rescue operations.

We reiterate that all people who are in need have the right to request and receive humanitarian assistance and international protection with special attention paid to vulnerable women and children. All rescue at sea and interception operations should ensure access to disembarkation and access to full and fair asylum procedures for those who express a need for international protection. Furthermore, we believe that no refugee should be penalized as a result of the way that she or he entered a country. The reception arrangements for those rescued at sea should be in line with international standards.

All authorities involved in border and immigration management should treat all persons with dignity and respect and in accordance with their obligations under human rights law.

Practical protection safeguards are required to be put in place and the differentiated protection requirements of people in this mixed population movement must be taken into consideration.

We are committed to support the efforts to provide humanitarian aid to the population.

We strongly urge the States involved to:

1. Provide people rescued immediate access to humanitarian assistance, especially vulnerable women and children, with adequate food, water, health care, shelter and sanitation.
2. Allow and facilitate access by humanitarian agencies and international organizations with protection mandates.
3. Ensure that people rescued at sea are not penalized for the way they have entered the country.
4. Those in need of international protection should be given access to asylum procedures.
5. Explore and pursue durable solutions with processes that draw input from affected persons.
6. Ensure procedural transparency and accountability to affected persons such that they are accorded due process of law and are fully informed of their rights and responsibilities and the limitations and time frames of any proposed solution.
7. Urgently develop regional and national solutions that address the root causes of refugee and migrant outflows.

Signatories:

1. Action Aid
2. Action Contre la Faim
3. Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma
4. AMAL Human Development Network
5. Amnesty International Australia
6. Asia Disaster Risk and Response Network
7. Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
8. Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network
9. Asia-Pacific Solidarity Coalition
10. Australian Council for International Development
11. Australian National Committee on Refugee Women
12. Badhan Hijra Sangha, Bangladesh
13. Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition
14. BRAC
15. Burma Partnership
16. Business and Welfare Initiatives Bangladesh
17. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association
18. CARAM Asia Berhad
19. CARAM Asia Network
20. CARAM Cambodia

21. Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees
22. Centre for Migration Research and Development, Sri Lanka
23. Centre for Participatory Research and Development, Bangladesh
24. Centre for Refugee Research, University of New South Wales
25. Children and Women Trust, Pakistan
26. Church World Service
27. Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust, Bangladesh
28. Community Development Services, Sri Lanka
29. Community World Service Asia
30. Empower India
31. Equal Rights Trust
32. Equity and Justice Working Group, Bangladesh
33. Fortify Rights
34. Gonggam Human Rights Law Foundation
35. Human Rights Defenders and Promoters
36. Human Rights Working Group, Indonesia
37. IMA Research Foundation, Bangladesh
38. Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion
39. International Council of Voluntary Agencies
40. International Movement of Catholic Students Asia Pacific
41. International Refugee Rights Initiative
42. ISDE Bangladesh
43. Jakarta Legal Aid Institute
44. Jesuit Refugee Service Asia Pacific
45. Knights for Peace, International
46. Law Life Culture, Bangladesh
47. Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid
48. Light House, Bangladesh
49. MAP Foundation, Thailand
50. Mercy Malaysia
51. Migrant Working Group, Thailand
52. Migration Working Group, Malaysia
53. Migrante International
54. Minority Rights Organization, Cambodia
55. Nepal Institute of Development Studies
56. Norwegian Refugee Council
57. Occupational Opportunities for Refugees & Asylum Seekers, Australia
58. Overseas Services to Survivors of Torture and Trauma
59. Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Program, Bangladesh
60. Oxfam Australia
61. Oxfam Great Britain
62. Oxfam International
63. Participatory Research Action Network, Bangladesh
64. Prodipan Bangladesh
65. Refugee Council of Australia
66. Refugee Rights Network Pakistan
67. Resource Integration Centre, Bangladesh
68. Rights Jessore, Bangladesh
69. Same Skies, Indonesia

70. Save the Children
71. Shikha Shatha Unnayan Kazakram, Bangladesh
72. Settlement Services International
73. Society for Human Rights and Prisoners Aid, Pakistan
74. St. John's Cathedral HIV Education Centre, Hong Kong
75. SUAKA, Indonesia Civil Society Network for Refugee Protection
76. Swahili Speaking Refugee Women Advocacy Services, Australia
77. Thai Commission for Refugees Foundation
78. Vietnamese Human Rights Defenders and Activists
79. WhyDev, Australia
80. World Vision International – Asia Pacific
81. Yayasan Kelompok Kerja Sosial Perkotaan, Indonesia
82. Youth Advocacy Network South Asia
83. Zo Indigenous Forum, India