

< Joint Statement >

The international community must respond to the thousands of lives stranded at sea in despair!

Joint Statement of Korean civil society organizations calling for immediate humanitarian aid for Rohingya boat people

Approximately 8000 ethnic and religious minority Rohingya peoples and Bangladeshi migrants who left Myanmar (Burma) and Bangladesh to escape to Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia are slowly dying on sea due to the respective governments' refusal to allow migrants ashore. The government of Thailand, which is the mid-way stopover for these migrants, has recently closed off its borders for reasons of cracking down on human trafficking while the Malaysian and Indonesian government have also refused to accept these boat people. As a result, 8000 migrants have been stranded at sea for more than two months with absolutely no support. Naturally, many migrants have been dying or suffering from serious health ailments. The Korean civil society organizations strongly demands that the Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesian governments allow for the migrants' boats to enter the respective countries and immediately provide humanitarian aid to these people. The international community, including Korea, must respond to the urgent situation of the Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants.

Over 1 million Rohingya people, who live in the Burmese Arakan state as Muslim and ethnic minorities, have suffered from discrimination and oppression for a long time. Due to the Burmese government's discrimination, the Rohingya people were unable to obtain citizenship and pursue livelihoods including education, and so their only option was to escape to a different country. Even the Rohingya people who migrated to refugee camps in Bangladesh are migrating again to Malaysia and Indonesia in order to escape the depressing reality of refugee camps since the Bangladesh government ended its Refugee resettlement support program in 2010.

Those Rohingya people who paid huge amounts of money to people smugglers in order to get on refugee smuggling boats are dying or suffering from human rights violations in the process of going to Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Even if these migrants are able to arrive in the mid-way stopover that is Thailand's Jungle Camp, they become victims of the human trafficking that happens through the collusion of local authorities and smugglers; not to mention, people smugglers have also taken migrants hostage in order to ask their family for ransom. When the Thai government conducted raids on these camps due to pressure from the international community, it uncovered many migrants' bodies here and there. The number of migrants who experienced human rights violations in refugee camps and died until now has yet to be known.

Unaware of the difficulty of arriving ashore due to the Thai government's raids and the shutdown of refugee camps, the thousands of Rohingya migrants who have already left Myanmar are stranded on sea with nowhere to go. Even now, no country is trying to take responsibility for these people who are still stuck on boats in the face of starvation and shipwreck. While there is an international meeting taking place in Bangkok on the coming May 29, where senior officials from Myanmar, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Australia and a total of 15 countries will participate in and discuss solutions, it is unclear how many more lives will disappear into the sea during these next two weeks. The principle that "everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries

asylum from persecution”, as defined by Human Rights Declaration Article 14, has not been applied for the Rohingya migrants.

Korean civil society organizations strongly demand that the international community, relevant countries, and the UN provide humanitarian support and initiate rescue plans for these refugees. We must begin with figuring out the location of these boats and rescuing them. We cannot allow thousands of lives to die at sea for any reason whatsoever. We cannot let the Rohingya migrants, who got on boats with the desperate hope that they would be able to live like humans and escape from their hellish lives, experience another hell. As a responsible member of the international community, the Korean government must also actively provide humanitarian aid to the Rohingya migrants and engage in diplomatic efforts so that Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia can solve this problem.

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