



Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA)

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Standing Members

Bangladesh

Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK);
Refugee and Migratory Movements
Research Unit (RMMRU);
Welfare Association of Repatriated
Bangladeshi Employees (WARBE)

India

Center for Education and
Communication (CEC); Migrant
Forum India (MFI)

Nepal

All Nepal's Women Association
(ANWA);
Women Rehabilitation Center
(WOREC), POURAKHI, Youth
Action Nepal (YOAC)

Sri Lanka

Action Network for Migrant
Workers (ACTFORM);
Migrant Services Centre (MSC);
Women and Media Collective
(WMC)

Cambodia

Legal Support for Children and
Women (LSCW), Cambodian
Women for Peace and
Development (CWPD)

Burma

Federation of Trade Unions –
Burma (FTUB)

Indonesia

Center for Indonesian Migrant
Workers (CIMW); Jarnas
Pekabumi; KOPBUMI;
Migrant Care;
Solidaritas Perempuan; Serikat
Buruh Migran Indonesia (SBMI)

Malaysia

Tenaganita

Philippines

Batis Center for Women;
Center for Migrants Advocacy
(CMA-Phils); Kapisanan ng mga
Kamag-anakan ng Migranteng
Mangagawang Pilipino
(KAKAMMPI);
Kanlungan Center Foundation, Inc.
(KCFI); Unlad Kabayan Migrants
Services Foundation, Inc.

Singapore

St. Francis Workers Centre
(SFWC) Humanitarian
Organization for Migration
Economics (HOME), Transient
Workers Count Too (TWC2)

Hong Kong

Asian Migrant Centre (AMC);
Coalition for Migrants Rights
(CMR);
Indonesian Migrant Workers Union
(IMWU)

Japan

Solidarity for Migrants – Japan
(SMJ)

Korea

Joint Committee for Migrant
Workers in Korea (JCMK)

Mongolia

Center for Human Rights and
Development (CHRD)

Taiwan

Hope Workers Center (HWC)

MFA Condemns Thai Government for Atrocities at Sea and Calls for Comprehensive Approach to Protect Rohingyas

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Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) is deeply disturbed by the reports emerging from Thailand, particularly, the Thai army's forced repatriation of Rohingyas refugees and migrant workers from Burma. The Thai Government's willingness to turn a blind eye to these atrocities is inhumane and contrary to its ASEAN and international commitments.

On 15 January 2009, BBC news reported that Thai soldiers were detaining and beating undocumented migrants and refugees from Bangladesh and Burma, then forcing migrants back into non-motorized boats without food or water, and with their hands tied. One survivor of these horrors revealed to CNN that six boats in a makeshift fleet arrived in Thailand in December. All six boats were set adrift and abandoned at sea. Five of the six boats sank.

Amnesty International estimates that the Thai military has expelled over 1,000 Rohingyas who have arrived by boat. India and Indonesia have rescued numerous boats and provided humanitarian relief to survivors. Most, however, are missing and feared drowned at sea.

Rohingyas, a Muslim ethnic group of Western Burma, have been driven out by brutal persecution by the military government which has denied their citizenship, rendering them stateless. For three decades now, the Rohingyas in Burma have subjected to extortion, land confiscation, forced eviction and in many cases, forced labour.

Stateless and facing extreme poverty, Rohingyas have fled to Southeast Asia for safety and livelihood. Sadly, many of the refugees end up in the hands of human traffickers, traded as migrant workers. The constructed line between refugee and migrant worker is far from clear. Recent events in Thailand have demonstrated that undocumented migrants, as both asylum seekers and migrant workers are highly vulnerable.

MFA supports the Thai government's decision to probe the alarming allegations of abuses against undocumented migrant workers and refugees and to convene a regional forum to address the situation of Rohingyas as well as irregular migrant workers. A regional initiative involving Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand is essential to establishing solutions to protect the Rohingya people and all migrant workers, ensuring their rights are upheld. We believe, however, that this is only a first step.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) must take the lead in tackling the humanitarian calamity in Burma. No longer can the regional

community ignore the mass flight of migrants from Burma. The occurrence of these tragic events on the heels of the upcoming ASEAN summit only reflects the diminishing credibility of the Association, especially as ASEAN moves to establish a human rights body. If ASEAN fails to act now, it risks losing authority and all relevance in the region.

MFA urges ASEAN to call an urgent session during its February meeting in Thailand to determine immediate actions and a long-term resolution to the issue of human rights in Burma and in the Southeast Asia;

We call upon the Thai government to immediately investigate the abuses committed against the undocumented migrant workers and refugees. The Thai Human Rights Commission or another independent body should be permitted to conduct an open inquiry into the allegations of human rights violations and given full access to all survivors, detainees, witnesses and relevant documents;

We appeal to the Thai government to stop the forced repatriation of Rohingyas and undocumented migrant workers to Burma which would put their lives in extreme jeopardy. UNHCR officials must be given full access to all survivors and detainees. Further, Thai navy official must ensure that undocumented migrants are transferred to immigration officials or police, as per protocol, rather than the army;

We advocate that both Bangladesh and Thailand ratify the UN Convention on Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, the UN Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons as well as the UN 1990 Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

We ask for all receiving states and sending states to uphold the highest standards of humanitarian principles and to provide relief and assistance to all refugees and migrant workers in crisis. The ASEAN Declaration, to which Thailand, Burma and Bangladesh are all signatory, clearly states that migrant workers that become undocumented through no fault of their own must be provided humanitarian assistance;

We also call for Burma to immediately halt the systematic persecution of the Rohingya and other minorities, which is the root cause of the crisis.

MFA is a regional network of non-government organizations (NGOs), associations and trade unions of migrant workers, and individual advocates in Asia that are committed to protect and promote the rights and welfare of migrant workers. It is guided by a vision of an alternative world system based on respect for human rights and dignity, social justice, and gender equity, particularly for migrant workers.

Sources:

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Thailand on refugees: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7853802.stm>

Thailand probes issue of boat people

<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/01/22/thailand.refugees/index.html>