



BURMESE ROHINGYA ORGANISATION UK (BROUK)

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Media Release from Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK

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Rohingya drownings an “avoidable tragedy”

The death from drowning of at least 15 people, including four children, was an avoidable tragedy that speaks to the desperation of Rohingya to live lives of dignity and safety, said the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) today.

At least 15 Rohingya people, including four children, died today and dozens of others are missing after their boat capsized off the coast of southern Bangladesh. According to Bangladeshi officials, the people on the boat were refugees who were trying to reach Malaysia with the aid of human traffickers.

“It is harrowing that Rohingya are so desperate to build better lives for themselves that they risk everything on dangerous journeys by sea. Our deepest sympathies go out to the victims and their families,” said Tun Khin, President of BROUK.

“Today’s drownings were an avoidable tragedy that speak to the suffering of Rohingya people. Denied citizenship and violently uprooted from their homes, many see no way out but to put their lives in the hands of traffickers to create a future for themselves and their children.”

Close to one million Rohingya refugees live in Bangladesh, almost 800,000 of whom have fled across the border since 2017 when the Myanmar military launched a vicious “clearance operation” in Rakhine State.

In Rakhine State, Rohingya have for decades been subjected to a genocide by Myanmar’s authorities. They live under an oppressive and dehumanising system that denies them access to citizenship, basic services, and often the ability to leave their own villages. Some 128,000 displaced Rohingya furthermore live in de facto displacement camps in squalid conditions.

Human traffickers have for decades preyed on vulnerable Rohingya people who are desperate to improve their lives in third countries. In 2015, during

the so-called Asian “boat crisis”, thousands of Rohingya were stranded at sea in overcrowded and rickety boats after regional governments cracked down on smuggling routes.

“Today’s drowning is simply one of many tragic consequences of a decades-long genocide. The only way to prevent such tragedies is to create conditions that allow Rohingya to live in peace and dignity. This must start in Myanmar, where authorities must immediately grant us citizenship and end all genocidal practices,” said Tun Khin.

“This must also be a wake-up call on the international community to continue to push Myanmar to improve conditions for Rohingya, including by heeding the provisional measures imposed by the International Court of Justice last month.

Despite Bangladesh’s generosity in opening its borders to those fleeing since 2017, Rohingya refugees in the country continue to face restrictions, including on their freedom of movement and access to the labour market. Many Rohingya also face restrictions on access to education, although in January 2020 Bangladesh announced a pilot program where thousands of refugees would gain access to schooling with the Myanmar curriculum.

“Bangladesh has been exceptionally generous in welcoming Rohingya refugees to their country when they had nowhere else to go. It is also extremely positive that authorities are starting to loosen restrictions on refugees’ access to education, giving thousands of children a chance to improve their lives,” said Tun Khin.

“We do however also urge Bangladeshi authorities to do what they can to make refugees’ lives as bearable as possible, including by protecting them against human traffickers, and allowing them access to the labour market.”

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