

Press release: Deadly sea crossings need urgent, comprehensive, international and regional actions to save Rohingya lives

The deteriorating situation of Rohingya remaining in Myanmar and as refugees in other countries in South and Southeast Asia is increasingly forcing them into deadly sea crossings, says Women's Peace Network in its latest briefing paper, "[The Rohingya boat crisis: Recent developments and key contributing factors in South and Southeast Asia](#)."

The paper assesses recent developments to the crisis and analyses the key contributing factors to it in the region. It draws particular attention to the year 2023, which the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [called](#) the "deadliest year" in a decade for Rohingya's maritime escape across the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, and the alarming conditions of the refugees and growing risk of atrocity in their host countries. The majority of the Rohingya had been trafficked from refugee camps in Bangladesh, and later sought refuge in Indonesia and Malaysia; nearly three-quarters of them are women and children.

"It is extremely disappointing to see a continued lack of protection and policy framework to address the boat crisis despite the drastic loss of life on sea over the years. And it is heartbreaking to witness how these genocide survivors still risk their survival even after being permitted to disembark from boats. Unless international and regional stakeholders act for protection, peace, justice, and accountability for all, this year will become an even more deadlier year for Rohingya than the last," says Wai Wai Nu, WPN's Founder and Executive Director.

The briefing paper calls upon governments in the region to ensure full access to security and livelihoods to Rohingya boat people, all of whom have faced abuses for their survival and, without immediate protection, risk being stranded on unseaworthy vessels to die. **Immediate and safe disembarkation, search-and-rescue missions, and other forms of protection must be guaranteed to the refugees.** Among them, women and girls in particular risk rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, child marriage, and other acts of sexual and gender-based violence throughout their harrowing escape. Additionally, in a region without a comprehensive or coordinated human rights and refugee protection framework and policies, refugees and asylum seekers risk being subjected to further abuses in their host countries. The paper provides an analysis of such countries, which include Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and India.

Ultimately, the root causes of the Rohingya boat crisis must be addressed. They include the situation in Myanmar, which the briefing paper describes as posing a growing risk of recurrence of genocide against the Rohingya ethnic minority. Since its attempted coup on February 1, 2021, the Burmese military has increasingly targeted Rohingya with laws and policies aimed at further entrenching their apartheid-like conditions, arbitrarily arrested and detained them, attempted to forcibly conscript them, and endangered their lives in its armed conflict with the Arakan Army - all the while committing atrocities of an increasing scale and frequency across the country.

"The international community must immediately address all root causes of the boat crisis with bold and robust actions for justice, accountability, and sustainable peace and security. The briefing paper provides key recommendations to international and regional stakeholders, including U.N. Member States, ASEAN, and Burma's neighboring countries," says Wai Wai Nu.

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