



STATEMENT

On the Deaths of Rohingya Refugees in Lang Suan District, Chumphon Province, Thailand

Thailand Migration Reform Consortium (TMR)
20 October 2024



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On October 18, 2024, the news reported the discovery of two deceased Rohingya refugees, along with around ten more, in an exhausted state in Lang Suan District, Chumphon Province. Further reports indicated that another Rohingya individual from this group died in the hospital (bringing the total number of deaths to three), and several others remain in critical condition.

According to a report from Transborder News on October 18, 2024, citing the Rohingya Talent Group: "There were over 70 Rohingya people in this transport, but when they arrived at Lang Suan, some appeared to be close to death, so they were let off. The rest were transported to their target location."

Preliminary information indicates that this human trafficking operation involved moving Rohingya from Rakhine State, Myanmar, or refugee camps in Bangladesh and India. They were transported across Myanmar to a border area opposite Mae Sot District. From there, they crossed the border, were loaded onto pickup trucks, and travelled to Phop Phra District. They then walked through the forest for about a day to reach the border of Mueang Tak District before boarding vans to Bangkok. They were sent to southern Thailand from Bangkok to continue their journey to Malaysia.

According to the Association of Rohingya in Thailand, there are currently between 1,500 and 2,000 Rohingya individuals, along with some Bangladeshis, in Myawaddy, Myanmar, preparing to be trafficked to Malaysia via Thailand. The ongoing unrest in Myanmar has led to a growing number of refugees fleeing the violence (As reported by Transborder News on October 19, 2024).

Thailand Migration Reform Consortium (TMR) is deeply concerned about the ongoing situation and has continually raised awareness of the plight of refugees fleeing the conflict in Myanmar, particularly those entering Thailand. Vulnerable groups, such as children, women, refugees, migrant workers, and their families, as well as undocumented individuals or those who are stateless in their home countries, are especially at risk of exploitation during migration.

The Royal Thai Government (RTG) has demonstrated its commitment to addressing Myanmar issues during the 44th and 45th ASEAN Summits in Vientiane, Laos, from October 9-11, 2024. Thailand proposed hosting an "informal consultative meeting" in December 2024 to find solutions to the conflict in Myanmar. Additionally, at the 75th Plenary Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner for Refugees Programme (UNHCR ExCom 75) in Geneva, Switzerland, from October 14-18, 2024, the RTG reaffirmed its intention to assist refugees, displaced persons, and stateless individuals to ensure they receive appropriate and timely protection, recognition of their rights, and access to opportunities.

Thailand has been elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), which is responsible for promoting and protecting human rights globally. We hope that both the RTG and Thai society will recognise this role and acknowledge the increasing impact of the conflict in Myanmar on Thailand.

Thailand Migration Reform Consortium (TMR) calls on the RTG, the National Security Council, relevant agencies, and international organisations to urgently consider and prepare to address the impact of the unrest in Myanmar, especially on vulnerable groups. It also calls for raising awareness within Thai society regarding the seriousness of the issue. The following are their specific recommendations:

1. The Prime Minister should establish a special task force that includes relevant government agencies, international organisations, academia, and civil society representatives. This task force would develop plans to address the crisis, coordinate with appropriate bodies, and promptly communicate humanitarian situations to the public.
2. The Prime Minister should appoint a Special Envoy on Myanmar to facilitate negotiations between Myanmar's military government, the National Unity Government of Myanmar, ethnic armed forces, and other stakeholders to resolve the crisis, working in collaboration with ASEAN and allied countries.
3. The RTG and the Royal Thai Police should allocate the necessary resources to enhance the capacity and preparedness of multidisciplinary teams responsible for screening, identifying, and temporarily registering irregular migrants. This process would help identify individuals, families, and their origins and gather details on the number of people entering the country by various means. These efforts should comply with the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E. 2551 (2008) and the Regulation of the Office of Prime Minister on the Screening of Aliens who Enter into the Kingdom and are Unable to Return to the Country of Origin B.E.2562 (2019).

4. The RTG and the Royal Thai Police should investigate and prosecute those involved in human trafficking networks and provide compensation and redress to victims as stipulated in the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E. 2551 (2008).
5. The RTG and the Royal Thai Police should enforce the Anti-Torture and Enforced Disappearance Act B.E. 2565 (2022), particularly Section 13, which enshrines the principle of non-refoulement—prohibiting the return of individuals to countries where they would face danger to their lives.
6. The RTG, through the Office of the National Security Council, the Royal Thai Police, and the Ministry of Interior, should integrate the management of different groups of refugees fleeing to Thailand. This includes screening and registering refugees following existing policies and laws to ensure humanitarian protection and combat transnational crime.
7. The RTG should adopt a proactive policy to foster cross-border cooperation for national and human security. This would involve creating a mechanism for collaboration between the Office of the National Security Council, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defense, the Royal Thai Armed Forces, and local authorities to manage the borders and address the influx of refugees from Myanmar. It should also consider setting up an international cooperation mechanism to share the responsibility with Thailand.
8. The RTG should urgently revise its border management policies and assistance for those fleeing unrest in Myanmar, considering irregular migration and mixed migration patterns to ensure an effective response to the crisis.

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