



Protection not Pushbacks! Refuge not Refoulement! Statement by #MilkTeaAlliance Friends of Myanmar

There have been many recent cases of countries returning people to Myanmar straight into the hands of the Junta, which has forcibly conscripted them into the military where they face abuse, risk of death or forced to fight against the peoples of Myanmar. Hence, we have watched in horror and disappointment as countries in Myanmar's neighbourhood have sought to push back those fleeing conflict and persecution into conflict zones.

Such actions prove immoral and hypocritical when carried out against those who have already suffered greatly, violating the basic standards of human rights that such countries otherwise profess commitment to. Recently, cases in Thailand, Malaysia, and Bangladesh have been widely reported on internationally, but the practice is widespread and seems to be becoming normalised.

On January 5th, Bangladesh detained 36 Rohingya entering Teknaf by boat. The Border Guard of Bangladesh has stated that the group will be sent back to Myanmar¹. This occurs despite the violence occurring in Rakhine against the Rohingya perpetrated by both Myanmar's military junta and the Arakan Army (AA)². Bangladesh should allow Rohingya to cross safely into Bangladesh and recognize their rights as refugees, as they have done in the past.

Similarly, Malaysia's coast guard has escorted away from its waters two boats carrying almost 300 people—in spite of that they were suffering from dehydration, starvation, and exhaustion³. This is horrific given that well over a thousand Rohingya are known to have perished in the last two years in a time of ethnic cleansing⁴. The Malaysian authorities as well as others are complicit in these deaths. Moreover, the Malaysian authorities have been immediately deporting detainees back to Myanmar without a review process or possibility for appeal. A dramatic change in policy, as before there was a level of due process and fines tended to be the punishment for a lack of documentation.⁵

Thailand has not only given the Junta in Myanmar more power to block workers as part of its drive to document more people⁶, but its immigration detention centres now regularly hand over people from Myanmar

¹<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/370008/36-rohingya-in-bgb-custody-after-intrusion>

²<https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/fog-of-war-the-battle-for-truth-and-blame-in-the-rakhine-conflict/>

³<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/malaysia-turns-back-boats-carrying-300-myanmar-migrants-2025-01-05/>

⁴ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar#powerbi>

⁵<https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/malaysia-conducts-mass-arrests-of-myanmar-migrants-in-end-of-year-crackdown/>

⁶ <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/myanmar-thai-re-registration-02112025095335.html>

directly over to the Junta's security forces who conscript them to fight⁷. Most recently, it is noted that Thailand also deported 40 Uyghurs back to China where they likely face the risk of imprisonment and torture, after holding them for well over a decade⁸.

These are just a few of the most recent examples of people fleeing conflict in Myanmar not being given succor and refuge by countries in the region. There are many more examples of refoulement and push backs that could be cited from India⁹, China¹⁰, Indonesia¹¹, and more. What these recent incidents point to, then, is the broader pattern of regional governments turning a blind eye to the atrocities that continue to take place, proving complicit at best, and at worst, active enablers of governments that carry out ethnic cleansing and other significant human rights violations.

It is noted that many of Myanmar's neighbours are providing some with refuge and aid. And yet much more needs to be done to provide safety and protection to those fleeing violence.

Regional governments have failed to take action to tackle the underlying issue at hand that is causing so many to flee. More broadly speaking, ASEAN countries as well as Myanmar's other neighbors continue to engage and support the Junta in Myanmar, with some supplying arms and fuel, while others continuing to grant the Junta legitimacy through diplomatic efforts. Engagement with the unjust and illegitimate military junta must and, instead, engagement with stakeholders of the peoples of Myanmar (CSOs, NUG, EAOs, state level governance structures) should be undertaken. Efforts for more cross-border aid are needed and actions to cut the Junta's access to arms, fuel, and foreign currency need to be taken.

The crisis in Myanmar caused by the attempted coup in February 2021 has gone on far too long, has displaced millions, and will continue to destabilize the region until such time that the Junta is removed—as is self-evidently desired by the peoples of Myanmar. Support to resistance organisations to establish governance and services is sorely needed.

We call on the governments of neighbouring & regional countries—especially Thailand, Malaysia and Bangladesh—to act with more compassion, to extend the hand of welcome to those fleeing Myanmar, to provide them with protection and permissions to work so that they can sustain themselves & contribute while guests in your countries. Please act with humanity and treat those how you would like to be treated in their position.

We, Milk Tea Alliance Friends of Myanmar, remain committed to advocating for democracy, human rights, and justice in the region. We stand united with Rohingya and the peoples of Myanmar and other oppressed communities, firmly believing that only through collective action can we build a better future for all.

#MilkTeaAlliance Friends of Myanmar
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⁷<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/investigation/thai-immigration-officials-feed-myanmar-deportees-into-juntas-war-machine.html>

⁸ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/02/thailand-deportation-of-uyghurs-to-china-unimaginably-cruel/>

⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-deports-myanmar-refugees-who-fled-2021-coup-2024-05-02/>

¹⁰ <https://english.shannews.org/archives/27768>

¹¹<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/29/indonesian-navy-pushes-back-rohingya-refugee-boat-off-aceh>