

PRESS RELEASE

Civil Society Groups Urge the EU to Take Stronger Steps in Response to the Rohingya Crisis

[Brussels, 22 January] – In a letter today to EU Foreign Ministers, 21 civil society organisations from inside and outside Myanmar call on the EU to take stronger steps to stand for the Rohingya.

The Rohingya faced ethnic cleansing. In recent months, Myanmar's authorities have prevented the UN Special Rapporteur to Myanmar, Ms Yanghee Lee, and the independent, international Fact-Finding Mission from entering the country. They have also detained several journalists covering Rakhine State.

Mark Farmaner, Director of Burma Campaign UK added: "We are highly concerned that despite the much-needed EU attention at the end of 2017 on the plight of the Rohingya, it appears that the EU's focus has turned to other priorities." Farmaner added, "We sent this letter today to highlight that Myanmar will not be discussed at the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on Monday 22 January. The situation continues to be dire for the many thousands of Rohingya forced from their homes and for those who remain in Rakhine State. The continuing lack of a concrete response sends the wrong message to the Myanmar Army and the Government of Myanmar, that they can get away with committing such grave crimes against not only the Rohingya, but also against other minorities throughout the country."

R. Iniyana Ilango, United Nations Advocacy Programme Manager of Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) added: "The government of Myanmar continues to defy international efforts for truth, justice and accountability in the country. At the UN the EU needs to urgently strengthen its response to meet the gravity of the gross and serious violations reported in Myanmar. The EU should also consider measures to sanction military leaders and businesses connected to the military and take the lead to initiate a global arms embargo on the country. The EU should respect the international legal principle of non-refoulement and not support any efforts to repatriate Rohingya refugees until their safety and fundamental freedoms are guaranteed by Myanmar in an independently verifiable manner."

As it stands, it is unclear if the refugees will be granted a legal status that allows their right to self-identification upon their return, and there are no guarantees of a long-term destination inside the country, much less their safety and security in the interim period.

Tun Khin, President of Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK commented: "How can anyone be expected to return to a place where they had to flee for their life and persecution continues without guarantee of security or legal citizenship." Tun Khin added, "The plans for return are premature and were reached without adequate consultation with the refugee community. This is reminiscent of the plans to deal with previous displacement and return of Rohingya refugees in 1990s, which led to scores of human rights violations. Past mistakes must not be repeated."

The open letter calls for the EU to pursue options for the application of universal jurisdiction relating to violations of international law in Myanmar, including supporting a referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court.

Commenting after the release of the letter, Khin Ohmar, Chair of the Advisory Board of Progressive Voice said: “Strong action must be taken against the Myanmar Army, which continues to deploy rape and gender-based violence against civilian women and girls – particularly the Rohingya – as weapons of war. They must not be allowed to act with such impunity”

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