



CFE-DMHA

Humanitarian Information Paper

Rohingya Crisis, 22 May, 2015
CHIP No. 1

BLUF – Potential Implications to PACOM

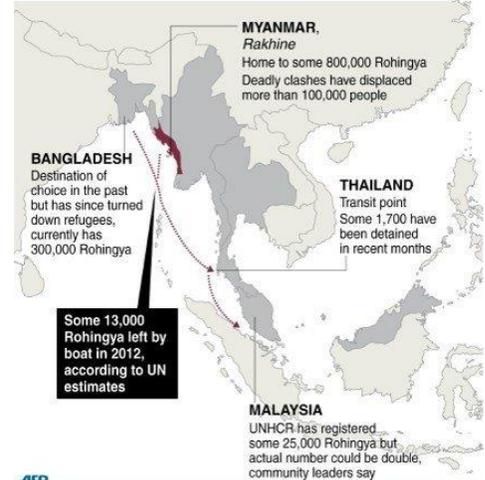
- Mass migrations of ethnic Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar (Burma) may necessitate multinational support in looking for migrant vessels and providing locations to assist regional partner nations in alleviating the immediate humanitarian crisis.
- Possibly requested support may include maritime domain awareness in Andaman Sea and nearby waters, search flights in international airspace, and information sharing with potential assisting countries: Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and others as necessary.
- Thailand is hosting a regional meeting on the issue on 29 May.

Key Concerns & Trends

- A significant spike in the estimated number of people departing irregularly by sea from the Bangladesh-Myanmar border area in the Bay of Bengal has resulted in a humanitarian crisis as neighboring countries tighten border security and smugglers refuse to bring boats ashore. (UNHCR)
- Reports on the numbers of migrants who remain stranded at sea vary greatly. UNHCR believes 4,000 remain at sea, while Malaysian authorities have said 7,000 are adrift. (NYTIMES)
- Thousands of people have been rescued in recent days without formal cooperation of governments in the region. Consolidated regional government/IOM figures released 21 MAY showed that over 3,600 people had disembarked in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Bangladesh. Just under half are from Bangladesh; the remainder claim to be Rohingya. (IOM)

The Rohingya exodus

Thousands of stateless Rohingya Muslims have fled deadly sectarian violence in Myanmar



Source: AFP

- As of 22 MAY, Indonesia and Malaysia agreed to temporarily host thousands of migrants stranded in boats at sea in Southeast Asia, after weeks of saying they were not welcome to come ashore. (IBTIMES) Malaysia has ordered search and rescue missions and Indonesia is setting up temporary shelters. (RELIEFWEB) Myanmar's Navy has rescued and detained 208 passengers at Maungdaw. The Navy's spokesperson reports they are Bangladeshi and will be returned to the country as soon as "all is clear." (NYTIMES)
- Numbers of official and unofficial Rohingya refugees vary throughout the region. Bangladesh hosts 230,000, Thailand hosts 120,000, and Malaysia hosts 80,000. Prior to the stricter border controls, 25,000 Bangladeshi and Rohingya migrants arrived in these countries in the first quarter of 2015. (UNHCR)
- Since the weekend there have been no new reports of landings elsewhere in the region. In the last nine days, a total of 1,396 people have landed in Indonesia, 1,107 in Malaysia and 106 in southern Thailand. (UNHCR)

Rohingya Population

Over 1 million Rohingyas live in both Myanmar and Bangladesh combined; Hundreds of thousands live elsewhere across Asia.

Rohingya populations can also be found in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. (BBC, Solidarities International)

Background

The Rohingya are fleeing difficult situations in both Myanmar and Bangladesh. Myanmar considers the Rohingya to be from Bangladesh, despite the fact that many have lived in Myanmar for generations. The Rohingyas were stripped of their Burmese citizenship under the citizenship law of 1982, making them stateless and vulnerable to exploitation.

The Rohingyas face discrimination from some extremist Buddhist nationalists, and from some elements of the Burmese population, who may consider the Rohingya to be a threat to Burmese identity. The situation has been ongoing for several decades, but in recent years, there was a resurgence of religious tensions that had been suppressed for years.

Inter-communal violence broke out in 2012 in Rakhine State, and many Rohingyas are living in displaced camps in Rakhine, one of the poorest areas in the country, where their movements are strictly limited. Tens of thousands fled the country to seek better opportunities in countries like Malaysia and other countries in the region. However, few are officially recognized as refugees.

According to UNOCHA, the holders of temporary identity certificates (white cards) in Myanmar were informed by Presidential decree in February 2015 that their documents would expire on March 31, 2015. Of the estimated 590,000 white card holders, some 490,000 are Rohingyas. They were told by the government to surrender their cards and invited to participate in a process to determine their citizenship.

There are an estimated 140,000 in Rakhine State, living in crowded camps. According to the UNHCR, around 25,000 had fled Rakhine State and Bangladesh in the first quarter of this year. An estimated 300 people have died while trying to do so.

UNHCR has also expressed concern for the welfare of up to 500,000 undocumented Burmese in Cox's Bazaar, a city in southeastern Bangladesh, close to the border with Myanmar. It is estimated that over 99 percent are Rohingyas fleeing neighboring Arakan State in Myanmar.

Sources used: *Solidarites International, European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department, UNOCHA, CNN, IOM, UNHCR, RCN*

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