



5.18.15

BURMA | Action Urged on Stranded Rohingya Refugees

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) called on the British government to press for EU Foreign Ministers meeting May 18 to discuss the case of Rohingya refugees currently stranded in the Andaman Sea.

The BBC reports that hundreds of Rohingya refugees have been **stranded on boats** for over a week in the Andaman Sea with no food or water after being refused entry to Thailand. Ten people have reportedly died, while survivors are forced to drink their own urine to survive.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We have written to the Foreign Office to request a public statement by the Foreign Secretary urging Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia to desist from sending the Rohingya boats back to sea. We call on Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) nations as a whole to work for a humane and just solution to the refugee crisis, including measures to rescue those at sea."

The Rohingyas are among the most persecuted peoples in Burma. In 1982, a new Citizenship Law removed their citizenship and rendered them stateless. The law has a serious impact on the country's Rohingya population, around one million people, who continue to live without citizenship rights such as the right to vote, to move freely, or to access basic services.

The question of citizenship has wider societal consequences as well. It remains one of the many issues fuelling recent violence in Rakhine (Arakan) State between the majority Buddhist Rakhine people and the predominantly Muslim Rohingyas. Many Rohingyas fled the country, risking their lives in boats on the open sea, or are living in camps for displaced people, with inadequate aid and assistance, and no freedom of movement. Furthermore, the state has restricted the access of humanitarian aid in Arakan state, leaving the Rohingya Muslims in dire hardship.

CSW is also calling on the UN Secretary-General to take a personal lead in responding to the refugee crisis and addressing the root causes by negotiating with the government of Burma for unhindered humanitarian access to Rakhine state.

Thomas added, "The world is in the grip of an unprecedented refugee crisis, with many people fleeing conflict, instability and human rights violations, including persecution on account of their ethnicity or religious beliefs. The international community must come together to tackle these issues and the EU, ASEAN and other nations must collaborate in order to provide relief for asylum seekers stranded on the seas of Southeast Asia or surfacing on the shores of the Mediterranean."