ASIA PACIFIC SUMMIT OF REFUGEES (APSOR)

OUTCOMES REPORT

February 2019

This paper outlines the discussions, key recommendations and outcomes from the Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees (APSOR), held on 22 October 2018 in Bangkok, Thailand, with participants in video hubs connecting to the Summit from Indonesia, Malaysia, Iran, India and Australia.

It includes:

1. Background information about the Summit;
2. An overview of discussions and information shared; and
3. Key recommendations and outcomes.

This paper provides an account of the discussions at this gathering, and outlines recommendations for how the ideas leading up to and arising from APSOR can be taken forward. These discussions and recommendations are relevant to inform the strategic thinking and actions of refugee-led organisations and networks at different levels, and to other stakeholders wishing to support the agency and voice of refugees and other forcibly displaced people in policy and decision-making processes.

BACKGROUND

On 22 October 2018, APSOR brought together 104 representatives from refugee-led organisations, networks and communities residing in 10 host countries in the Asia Pacific region to discuss and plan for greater refugee participation in policy- and decision-making. This was the first opportunity of its kind for refugee leaders in the Asia Pacific region to come together to share experiences, network and discuss how to strengthen refugee self-representation at all levels (locally, regionally and internationally).

The Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees followed on from discussions that took place in Geneva in June 2018 at the inaugural Global Summit of Refugees (GSOR)[1]. One of the key recommendations coming out of this Global Summit was for an "inclusive international platform for refugee participation and self-representation" to be established, "made up of a representative network of refugee community organisations, initiatives and change-makers from around the world".[2] In working towards the establishment of a representative international refugee-led advocacy network, a proposal was developed to hold regional-level discussions. The Asia Pacific region, through APSOR, was the first of these regional-level discussions.

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[1] See: http://www.networkforrefugeevoices.org/global-summit-of-refugees.html
[2] See: http://www.networkforrefugeevoices.org/uploads/1/0/9/9/109923753/gsor_outcomes_and_policy_paper_final.pdf

Both Summits recognise that the inclusion of refugees in policy- and decision-making is important in acknowledging and facilitating refugee agency and self-determination. With personal experience in situations of displacement, refugees are well placed to offer practical and sustainable solutions. Refugees can be powerful agents of change, evidenced through their capacity to take charge of building local communities and filling gaps in services and assistance. These Summits also recognise that a major challenge in enabling refugee self-representation at an international level is the lack of opportunities for refugee representatives to come together and work collaboratively on areas of shared concern. This is particularly so in the Asia Pacific region, where many refugees reside in host countries where they have uncertain legal status, limited access to resources, and restrictions placed on mobility that mean travelling to international gatherings is not possible. For these reasons, the Summit trialled connecting people through video hubs to enable groups to connect from different host countries.

Objectives

The objectives of the Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees were to:

1. Facilitate the sharing of experiences and information about what is happening in refugee-led advocacy in different parts of the Asia Pacific region;
2. Share information with refugee leaders in the Asia Pacific region who were not involved in the Global Summit of Refugees about the lead-up and current planning for an international refugee advocacy network;
3. Plan for future collaboration at a regional level for refugee-led organisations, networks and advocates based in the Asia Pacific.

Participation

The Summit involved 104 participants connecting via six hubs located in Bangkok, Thailand (main hub); Jakarta, Indonesia; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; New Delhi, India; Mashhad, Iran and Sydney, Australia (Figure 1) and from ten countries of residence (Figure 2). Participants came from 19 countries of origin in Asia, Africa and Middle East (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Participants by hub location

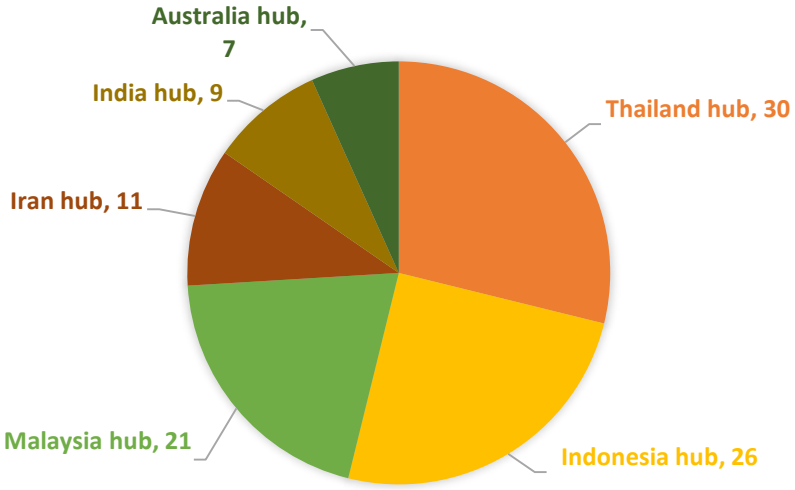


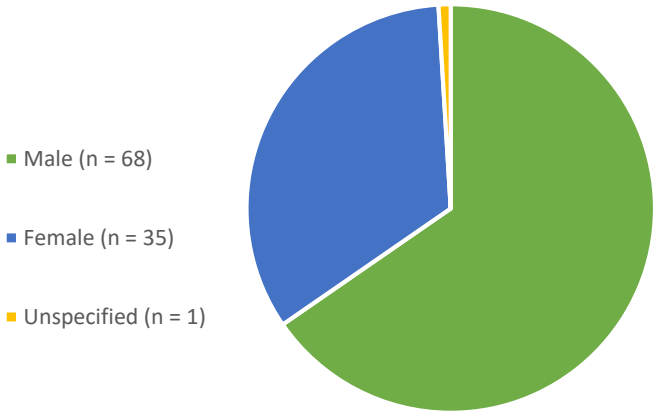
Figure 2. Participants by country of residence

Country of residence	No. of Participants
Indonesia	26
Malaysia	21
Thailand	16
Australia	14
Iran	11
India	9
New Zealand	4
Myanmar	1
Japan	1
Hong Kong	1

Figure 3. Participants by country of origin

Country of Origin	No. of Participants
Afghanistan	38
Myanmar/Burma	29
Pakistan	6
Somalia	7
Sri Lanka	3
Sudan	2
Ethiopia	2
Iran	2
Iraq	2
Vietnam	2
Eritrea	2
Bhutan	2
Russia	1
Cambodia	1
Kurdistan	1
Togo	1
Palestine	1
Sierra Leone	1
DR of Congo	1

Figure 4. Participants by gender



Organisation and support

The Summit was organised by GSOR Steering Committee members based in the Asia Pacific region (principally Najeeba Wazefadost from the Australian National Committee of Refugee Women/Hazara Women of Australia and Tin Ma Ma Oo from the New Zealand National Refugee Association), with logistical support from staff and interns at the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) and Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA).

Funding to cover basic meeting costs in each hub, including transportation costs for participants, was provided by RCOA and Overseas Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (OSSTT). Significant support was provided by: Ally Walsh and Matt Potts - *interns*; Menara by Kibar, Indonesia; Roshan Learning Center, Indonesia; Trish Cameron, APRRN member, Indonesia; ARA Trust, India; Geutanyoe, Malaysia; Rohingya Project, Malaysia; HOST International, Australia; Dr Azadeh Dastyari, Monash University, Australia - *in kind support*; Trin Khumsap, Thailand - *IT support*; Janbaz Salehi – *photography (Indonesia)*; Independent Diplomat - *international advisory and media support*.

Hub Facilitators were: Najeeba Wazefadost and Tin Ma Ma Oo (Thailand/Summit); Farida Ahmadi and Zohra Ahmadi (Indonesia); Marilyn Nu and Isack Hassan (Malaysia); Ali Javad Eslamzadeh (Iran); Valy Ahadi (India); and Om Dhungel (Australia).

DISCUSSION

"Today, we are all here for the same purpose. We are all here to create a change. … We are all here because we are sick and tired of crises going on. We are all here because we want to take and control the solution…

We know one size doesn't fit all in every country around Asia. Crises are different, but the challenges and the solutions can also be common. …We are here because we believe it is through collaboration that we can create a united voice; a voice that will bring and increase self-representation and participation, not only at the local level, but also at the international level."

- Najeeba Wazefadost

Session 1. Introduction and Welcome

Najeeba Wazefadost and Tin Ma Ma Oo, GSOR Steering Committee members and overall facilitators of the Summit, welcomed participants and provided an overview of the agenda and background to how APSOR came about and why it is important. Najeeba reminded participants of the importance of working collaboratively on common issues and of the need for greater self-representation, including at an international level.

APSOR followed on from the Global Summit of Refugees held in Geneva on 26-27 June 2018, in which 72 refugee representatives from around the world came together to discuss similar issues. However, there was under-representation of refugees from the Asia Pacific region at the Global Summit because of barriers faced, including travel restrictions and legal status. Convening APSOR was intended to provide a space for refugees in the Asia Pacific region to come together to share experiences and discuss how to work collaboratively in the future.

Yiombi Thona, Chair of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) and fellow GSOR Steering Committee member, spoke to Summit participants by pre-recorded video, encouraging refugee self-representation to be strengthened through the building of positive identities at different levels to combat stereotypes and prejudices.

Hub facilitators introduced themselves and the participants in their hubs: Zohra Ahmadi introduced the Indonesia hub, where 30 representatives from refugee-led organisations and networks participated from Afghan, Pakistani, Somali, Oromo and Iranian

communities. Om Dhungel introduced the Australia hub, where participants were from Afghan, Burmese and Bhutanese communities. Marilyn Nu from the Refugee Coalition of Malaysia introduced the Malaysia hub, where 23 participants had gathered from communities from Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan and Syria. Ali Javad Eslamzadeh introduced the Iran hub, where participants were of Afghan background. The India hub joined the Summit during a later session, with Valy Ahadi introducing eight participants from communities from Burma, Somalia, Afghanistan and Democratic Republic of Congo.

"To be represented by ourselves, we need first to build our identity. (This) is not something you can wake up next morning and just (do). An identity is built through a process—it takes time, to know yourself and who you are, to try to maximise what you can do in society, what you can bring to change the society."

\- Yiombi Thona

Photo: *Bangkok connected on screen to video hubs*

Credit: Matt Potts

Session 2. How could refugee voices be heard more strongly at an international level?

This session, led by Najeeba Wazefadost and Tin Ma Ma Oo, provided participants with detail of how the Global Summit of Refugees (GSOR) came about and the significance of this and other events in how refugee voices can and are being heard more strongly at an international level. Refugee self-representation as a movement has gained momentum in the context of unprecedented global forced displacement and as increased attention is paid to 'refugee participation' in policy discourse, a point that was clearly made in the 2016 *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*[3] where refugees are named as key stakeholders.

> *"A door has opened... They need to talk to us, and they need our help and they need our support… Now, the 'nothing about us without us' has become the way of moving forward. …In order to get to the global level—such as to the UN and the main decision-makers—we need the movement (to work) from local, national, regional, then to global." – Tin Ma Ma Oo*

In June 2018, 72 refugee representatives from 27 refugee hosting countries gathered in Geneva for the first ever **Global Summit of Refugees**. GSOR was unique because it was organised by and for refugees, with steering committee members from around the world. It was held in the days prior to the UNHCR Annual Consultations with non-government organisations (NGOs) in Geneva, and it created a shift in the way NGOs and other stakeholders could perceive refugee-led advocacy. GSOR itself came about after years of international-level advocacy by refugees about the importance of self-representation, with a number of advocates calling for refugees to be involved in decision-making dialogue as people with expertise who can and should be able to contribute as equal partners.

[3] https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/declaration

Attention was drawn in this session to key recommendations coming out of GSOR, namely:

> *"I have this dream that refugees are able to share their stories and at the same time they are mentored and supported and empowered to go beyond story-telling; to be involved in designing and creating and implementing and evaluating projects for their own communities. Because who knows better than them?"*
>
> – Najeeba Wazefadost

1. An inclusive international platform for refugee participation and self-representation must be established, made up of a representative network of refugee community organisations, initiatives and change-makers from around the world.
2. Refugee-led organisations and networks must be guaranteed a seat at the negotiation table at all levels (local, state, regional and international) to raise the concerns of affected populations in policy and decision-making fora relating to forced displacement, including the Global Refugee Forum and UNHCR Executive Committee meetings.
3. All actors involved in international protection must consider and actively work towards the meaningful inclusion and enablement of refugee-led organisations and initiatives as equal partners in the pursuit of solutions to forced displacement. This includes considerations about allocation of resources, ways to support leadership and capacity building requests made by refugee-led organisations and networks, and analysing and addressing barriers to participation.

The session highlighted some of the challenges of refugee self-representation at an international level, including the fact that much of the high level dialogue takes place in Geneva and not where refugees live, and the lack of resources available that would enable meaningful and diverse refugee representation. Importantly, the session proposed the establishment of an Asia Pacific refugee network connected to the newly-establishing global refugee advocacy network.

The session also highlighted the opportunity offered by the 7th Asia Pacific Consultation on Refugee Rights (APCRR7)[4], which took place in Bangkok in the days immediately after APSOR and brought together different stakeholders from the region. APCRR7 presents an opportunity for refugee leaders to call on members of the APRRN network to work towards greater refugee participation in advocacy at all levels. It was suggested that a new working group be proposed at the 2018 APPRN annual general meeting on 23 October that would focus on refugee leadership and participation.

Photo: *Indonesia hub participants hear from Najeeba and Tin Ma Ma as they explain how a movement of refugee self-representation is building.*

Credit: Janbaz Salehi

[4] See https://aprrn.info/apcrr/

Session 3. Sharing experiences from across our region

This session provided an opportunity for Summit participants to hear how refugees were organising and advocating in different countries in the Asia Pacific region. Nominated speakers from different host countries were asked to share information on how refugees were organising in their country, what was working well, where there had been successes, and what the key challenges were in refugee-led advocacy in their country.

Thailand

Hayso (Saw Su Gyi) from the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) on the **Thai-Burma border** spoke about the extensive services, support and organising undertaken by the KRC since it was established in the 1970s, with camps hosting up to 150,000 people at different times. A third of the camps on the border are managed by elected refugees themselves, with support from international NGOs (INGOs). Refugee-run programs in camps include education (with more than 160 schools), livelihoods, security, camp management and health. A key current challenge for refugee leaders is engagement with the issue of repatriation to Burma, which is currently voluntary and involves the Thai and Myanmar governments and UNHCR. Hayso talked about concerns about timing and communication with refugees on returning to Burma, and spoke positively about the need for a platform that would give refugees a voice about these matters at an international level.

Nuon Sopheap presented the situation of approximately 8,000 **urban refugees** in Thailand, who come from different communities and are mostly located in Bangkok. The major concerns for urban refugees are: a lack of security and uncertain legal status, leading to arrest, exploitation and detention; lack of access to higher education; and a lack of durable solutions, particularly for those who are being held in immigration detention centres. Despite these very difficult circumstances, refugee communities are trying to organise to advocate, particularly with the Thai people, to raise awareness about their situation.

Malaysia

> *"What is even more important to us is that our voice, and our many voices championing us, are not lost in the dark."*
>
> - Teel Sian Huai

In Malaysia, Teel Sian Huai spoke about refugees from Myanmar coming from various ethnic minority groups who are represented by their respective community organisations, which assist them and act as a link with the authorities and various NGOs. Refugees have set up multiple community support organisations, which provide services such as education. There is also a new national refugee network which aims to bring communities together (Refugee Coalition of Malaysia). Refugees in Malaysia face many challenges which include: a lack of work rights and legal status, poor access to affordable healthcare and formal education, insecurity and exploitation, risk of arrest, inhumane conditions in detention centres, and sexual and gender based violence. Teel Sian also spoke about concerns within refugee communities about repatriation to Myanmar, and particularly the cessation of protection to refugees from Chin state, which is leading to increasing rates of depression and homelessness.

Iran

Mohammad Vaezi presented on the estimated three million Afghan refugees in Iran, of whom two thirds are unregistered and receive minimal assistance. Despite the lack of legal status and support, Afghan refugees in Iran have had some successes in terms of access to higher education and business. A fundamental challenge is, however, the lack of certainty for refugees in Iran about their status and future.

India

Valy Ahadi also drew attention to the lack of legal status for refugees in India, with flow on effects for refugees in terms of work rights and livelihood opportunities, including refugee-run businesses. There is no established refugee-led network in India.

Indonesia

Zohra Ahmadi presented on behalf of the Indonesia hub, speaking about the numerous challenges facing approximately 14,000 refugees in Indonesia: "Refugees here are deprived of their rights to work, study at college or university, marry, travel around the country or even open a bank account." Refugees themselves have come up with solutions within the communities, starting with the provision of basic education. **Over the past few years, at least 11 refugee-led organisations and networks have been established in Indonesia**. These include: six educational learning centres, a refugee information centre, community centre, karate club, refugee network and women's support group. Some of the successes of these refugee-led organisations include: provision of education to children (with each learning centre serving around 200 refugee students); exploring the ways in which learning centres can provide higher education for young adults; empowering and finding solutions through refugee networks for the challenges refugees face in their daily lives; bringing and connecting refugee-led organisations and other local organisations or individuals together. The information centre provides legal aid such as helping refugees with appeals to UNHCR, medical care and distributing care packages among individuals and vulnerable refugee families. Challenges for refugee organising in Indonesia include the lack of funding, legal status, work rights and healthcare.

Hong Kong

Speaking from the Bangkok hub, Darius outlined some of the challenges facing refugees and asylum seekers in Hong Kong, where he has been living for six years. He spoke of the isolation of refugee communities and of the negative public discourse: "Everything about refugees in Hong Kong is portrayed as negative." Refugees have no work rights, limited access to education (including higher education), and insufficient financial assistance. There are low rates of acceptance for asylum applications, lengthy processing times and deportation risks. Refugees have come together through sport (All Black FC) and, with the support of NGOs, have had some successes engaging the media and local communities.

> *"So far we have changed the mindset of many people in Hong Kong, especially the students, because we do outreach and try to talk to people about the issues that refugees have. We (have got) more people to help us, and we (have) created more connections to build a community where refugees can realise their potential and skill..." - Darius*

Japan

Desale shared his experience as a PhD student and refugee living in Japan, where there is currently no organised refugee network. However, refugees are gathering together and sharing ideas informally. Generally, there is a lack of engagement on refugee issues by NGOs and the government

in Japan, where 99.9% of asylum applications are rejected. Other challenges include lack of work rights, access to education or financial support, homelessness and isolation for refugees living outside main cities.

Australia

Facilitator of the Sydney hub, Om Dhungel, described two distinct experiences in Australia, that of people seeking asylum (where there is a lot of advocacy work to be done) and the experiences of refugees who are resettled. Anyone who settles in Australia has an opportunity to organise themselves as a minority group, which is positive because it builds leadership. The Refugee Communities Advocacy Network (RCAN) is an example of a refugee-run organisation. Shukufa Tahiri, speaking about RCAN, described how the work of refugee community organisations can be invisible, and that the success of RCAN is in the way it brings different communities together to collaborate and amplify refugee voices. RCAN is a platform for refugee communities. The network is guided by principles such as refugee self-representation; grassroots engagement; and collaboration and partnership with civil society, government, media and bodies such as UNHCR. An opportunity Om referred to, based on some success, is moving from adversarial advocacy to more diplomatic advocacy.

> *"How do we help the organisations working with us to redefine refugee strengths rather than taking that needs-based approach? …The challenge for us is how to drive that paradigm shift from a needs-based approach to a strengths-based approach." – Om Dhungel*

New Zealand

Viyan Basharati from the New Zealand Refugee Youth Council (NZRYC) spoke about issues facing refugee young people (including education, mental health, employment, language barriers and social isolation) and how NZRYC is run for refugee youth by refugee youth as an organisation without any political, religious, cultural or ethnic affiliation. NZRYC hold leadership camps, homework camps and events to bring young people together, and facilitate training sessions for the wider community on ways they can help refugee youth. Dr Arif Saeid from the NZ Refugee Council spoke about the successes of resettled refugees in NZ in terms of education, business and politics (including the election of the first Member of Parliament from a refugee background). Challenges in NZ include the lack of resources for refugee-led organisations and the experience of being treated as a threat if you stand up and show the world you wish to do something.

> *"There are around 11 or 12 (refugee-led) organisations that are doing very good work in Indonesia, trying to provide basic needs that refugees have, such as health and education. I'm really happy to finally see all the refugees from different countries coming together and joining hands to do something bigger and better for all the refugees around the world. But how do we join hands and how can we collectively work together to better provide these basic needs to refugees? Because we are doing the services, we are providing the services that we can here, but we don't have access to funds, to income, to a budget. How can we, as a network …work together to provide more resources, and to have bigger sources of funds, so that we can help and support refugees in a better way?"*
>
> – Indonesia hub participant

Q&A

A brief discussion was facilitated at the end of the session. Some of the ideas suggested or questions asked included:

- How do we ensure that less visible refugees in different contexts are given needed attention within larger refugee populations?
- How can we work collaboratively to advocate for more funding to be allocated directly to refugee-led organisations to provide services and supports?

- How do we collect evidence and share examples of good practices and projects run by refugee communities in areas where there is limited funding (for example, work being done by refugee learning centres in Indonesia)?
- How can refugees and refugee-led organisations come together to create a space to be able to talk directly to donor countries and donor organisations, not through INGOs? (*"It does not need to come through a hierarchy, from INGO to NGO to local community organisation."*)
- How do we provide a voice for those who cannot speak or participate in gatherings such as this (for example, stateless Bhutanese inside Bhutan)?

Session 4 and 5. Hub workshops

Session four was a workshop that was held in each country hub separately, and where participants sought to discuss and document answers to two questions:

1. **What are the key issues that refugee communities would like to be working on** in the next two years (through refugee-led networks or with networks like APRRN or the Global Refugee Advocacy Network)?
2. **How can refugee-led networks work together** in the future? What sort of hopes do you have for what could be done and what can come out of such a connection? (see Options Paper – *included as an appendix*)

All hubs then reconnected after the workshop to feed back to the Summit the priority issues to work on and ideas for how refugee-led networks can work together in the future. The following section provides an overview of the priorities that were fed back in session five, as well as other issues or ideas that were discussed.

Photos: *Indonesia hub (top left), Bangkok hub (top right) and Australia hub (left) workshops underway.*

Credit: Janbaz Salehi

PRIORITY ISSUES TO WORK ON

- **Employment and livelihoods** (Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Iran) – online job opportunities; work rights; expansion of employment opportunities outside particular industries.
- **Addressing xenophobia** and raising awareness about the situation of refugees in host countries (Indonesia, India, Japan, Hong Kong) – how to amplify the voices of refugees through social media, film, and media engagement.
- **Access to primary and secondary education** (Malaysia, India, Indonesia) – how to ensure refugee community schools can be recognised in terms of formal qualification or certification, particularly at a secondary school level; access to formal or accredited schools.
- **Legal protection** (Australia, Iran, Thailand) – which means different things in different countries, but covers issues such as access to legal representation and legal rights, but also citizenship in countries of origin (e.g. Rohingya), regularisation of status after decades living in a country (Afghans in Iran), and access to legal documents such as birth certificates.
- **Access to healthcare, including mental health care** (Indonesia, Malaysia, India) – options for online or remote counselling, setting up refugee health clinics, lack of registration restricting access to necessary education and healthcare (India).
- **Access to higher education or skills training** (Indonesia, Thailand) – how can distance learning opportunities be facilitated, including to train teachers in refugee schools; recognition of prior qualifications and training.
- **Registration** (Malaysia, Iran) – for people who do not have access to refugee status or documentation which could provide some security.
- **Safe and voluntary return** (Australia, Malaysia) – ensuring this is safe and voluntary, particularly raised by communities from Myanmar.
- **Detention conditions** (Malaysia) – and how to address this.
- **Access to information** (Iran) - Censorship is a significant issue, which restricts the flow of information, which in turn restricts access to opportunities (Iran) – Information available in Australia is not necessarily available in Iran.

> *"If we cannot work in Indonesia there are companies that offer online jobs, there are websites that offer online jobs, and there are other ways that refugees actually can work together to find those channels so that they can work together."*
>
> – Feedback from Indonesia hub workshop

IDEAS FOR FUTURE REFUGEE NETWORK COLLABORATION

Structure

- A **system of accountability** needs to be established for a regional network, where information and ideas run both ways (from communities to representatives on the network and back again).
- Ensure that the network is effective and has **robust planning** – need for rich and well-planned policies so that all refugee-led committees cooperate with each other to reach the aim and to be effective.
- The Refugee Communities Advocacy Network (RCAN) is **a good model** that has been working in Australia, and could be used by others. For example, focussing on working collaboratively to engage with policy discussions.
- **Ensuring representation of those outside of resettlement countries**, where there are greater barriers to participation (including people in rural areas and detention centres).

- We can do better for refugee communities and encourage solidarity by **establishing special interest and support groups of refugees**.
- Having a refugee network that includes **representatives from each country**. Representation from every country is very important in the refugee network, as each country has their own problems and solutions. It would be really good to establish a structure in a way that we can have at least two to three people from each country representing that regional group.
- The network should be a **registered entity** and be legally recognised for different countries and different branches. So from there we can work strongly without any restrictions or any problems with the hosting governments.
- The regional branch should come together and **form a committee** where we will work on issues that we have discussed. Some of those that are doable and some that are not doable and find alternatives that can reduce those barriers of self- representation and active participation.
- There should be **criteria in terms of being on the committee**, so that we have the most effective advocates.

Activities

- Using **online consultations** (similar to the video hub conferencing) to create more awareness about what's happening in the region.
- **Mapping resources and opportunities** in the region, and sharing this information with refugee-led networks.
- **Submitting policy statements** and lobbying for policy change at different levels (e.g. National and international).
- Refugee leaders from different countries around the world should submit **monthly reports** about refugees' statuses to each other.
- We should establish **an online group** to read and analyse these reports and make decisions and prioritise the issues to solve.
- Create an **online platform (website)** to share news that refugees from anywhere in the world can use.
- **More face-to-face workshops** like APSOR that bring refugees together so we can listen to each other's ideas.
- **Translation of materials**, to assist in those countries where there are problems with birth certificates and other documentation that need to be translated.
- Creating **social media groups**, to strengthen the international network.

""We wanted to bring up the issue of having difficulty in communicating with UNHCR, where most of the refugee communities are feeling that we are not included in the decision making process. We really would like to ask UNHCR to include community-based organisation and for community-based organisation to be a part of the decision-making process."

– Feedback from Malaysia hub workshop

Objectives

- We can **share our recommendations and best practice** amongst sub groups, and link them to the Global Summit for Refugees.
- Direct access **to resources and capacity building** for the refugees themselves.

Photos: *Feeding back next steps and ideas from Indonesia (left) and Malaysia (right) hubs.*

Session 6. Wrap up and next steps

The final session involved bringing the Summit to a close by considering what steps can be taken from here to enable ongoing communication between participants. A central focus of this discussion was how to establish a regional branch of the international refugee advocacy network that would work closely with countries of asylum and NGOs. This regional branch would come together and form a committee that would work on issues that were raised in the hub workshops from earlier sessions. The goal of the committee would be to reduce barriers to self-representation and active participation for refugee communities across the region.

Attendees were invited to nominate two volunteers from their countries that could be initially involved in the regional network committee. A participant from Australia suggested that the work of the regional branch would be made most effective through the establishment of terms of reference and criteria for membership on the committee. The proposal to create a regional branch was unanimously supported by attendees at APSOR.

The final avenue for communication highlighted in session six was the creation of a Facebook page to which every APSOR participant could be added. This Facebook page would be used to exchange ideas, information and updates on the activities of the regional branch.

Finally, the facilitators sincerely thanked everyone, especially participants, who had played a role in the success of the Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees. Attendees in turn thanked facilitators for their work throughout the Summit's sessions.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND OUTCOMES

Two key recommendations coming out of the Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees were:

1. That an Asia Pacific refugee network be established which includes representatives from across the region and which can act as a connector with the newly-establishing global refugee advocacy network and refugee communities in the Asia Pacific region.
2. That a new working group be proposed at the 2018 APPRN annual general meeting on 23 October that would focus on refugee leadership and participation.

Other recommendations:

- Create a Facebook group.

APRRN

- Consider how to include refugees who cannot travel to APRRN meetings, including at the next Asia Pacific Consultation on Refugee Rights.
- How can networks like APRRN apply on behalf of or for funding to support refugee learning centres or refugee centres in the Asia region.

UNHCR

- Open up direct communication channels between refugee community organisations and UNHCR (Malaysia)

Evaluation

All participants were invited to respond to an online evaluation survey in the weeks following APSOR. On the **best aspects of APSOR**, the evaluation found that:

- All participants stated that they found attending APSOR useful.
- A majority (57.7%) of participants reported that the most successful outcome of attending the summit was 'being able to discuss future collaboration and priority concerns so that refugees have a stronger voice'.
- All participants were interested in being involved with an ongoing network.

The following were responses to what should be done as part of **follow up to the Summit**:

- Give regular (e.g. quarterly) follow-up updates to participants
- Use social media channels (e.g. a WhatsApp group) to communicate
- Include more refugees in the decision-making process for future meetings
- Have more meetings like the Summit, including face-to-face gatherings

Regarding **how the Summit could have been improved**, responses included:

- The Summit could have gone for a longer time
- Better facilitation
- Improve the quality of equipment/internet
- Having briefings be less technical so they are user friendly for the target audience
- More space for experience sharing

More information

Email: asiapacificsummitofrefugees@gmail.com

APPENDIX – OPTIONS PAPER

ASIA PACIFIC SUMMIT OF REFUGEES (APSOR)

REFUGEE SELF-REPRESENTATION OPTIONS PAPER

October 2018

This paper provides some ideas and options to inform the discussion at APSOR on:

- *How can refugee-led networks work together in the future? What sort of hopes do people have for what could be done and what can come out of such a connection?*

WHAT IS 'SELF-REPRESENTATION'?

When talking about self-representation, we mean the ways in which people who have been forcibly displaced (refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless people) can influence decision-making processes and can 'represent' themselves, their concerns and ideas when decisions are being made. Self-representation can mean individuals speaking for themselves or being able to represent a bigger group of people.

Why is refugee self-representation important?

Involving those affected by forced displacement in decision-making can result in:

- **Better protection**: including refugee voices in decision-making about protection interventions can reduce the likelihood of responses that inadvertently exclude or cause harm to individuals, groups or communities;
- **More creative responses**: refugees understand different dimensions of a situation in ways that those outside this context may not be able to, and can bring new and creative ideas for how to address an issue or concern that works for a situation;
- **Greater accountability**: by ensuring voices of those who are the target of international responses are heard at every stage—from planning to implementation and evaluation—means stronger channels of accountability to beneficiaries;
- **Greater efficiency**: including refugees in decision-making can identify existing skills and capacity within communities that can lead to greater efficiencies with existing and limited resources;
- **Empowerment**: enabling refugees as decision-makers and agents of change can help restore a sense of dignity, control and well-being to those who have been displaced.

What are the challenges?

Being able to represent yourself and your community at different levels of decision-making (locally, nationally and internationally) is not always simple, despite the clear benefits. With over 68 million people forcibly displaced around the world, self-representation often means representatives being selected (or self-selecting) to speak on behalf of others. This raises important questions about **who gets to speak for whom**, and how to ensure that a diverse range of experiences, needs and ideas are heard.

While at a local level there may be more opportunity to consider the diversity of experiences, needs and solutions, spaces for self-representation get smaller at national and international decision-making levels. As these spaces are limited, it is very important that there are good **models of effective representation**, so that those who are able to participate in advocacy are able to represent wider communities and have a good understanding of the decision-making process they are participating in.

Ensuring refugee-led advocacy is effective requires refugee representatives being given access to decision-making processes, and also having the **time, resources and knowledge** to be effective in influencing these processes.

HOW CAN REFUGEES IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION WORK TOGETHER?

The following are options that could be explored on how to organise to ensure refugee voices are heard and can be effective influencers at different levels. Some of these things are already happening. Some of the benefits and challenges of these various approaches have been included.

In your local area…

- **Local community-based organisations (CBOs)**: There are many examples of organisations being set up by and for refugees for mutual support. Coming together to form an organisation that addresses local challenges can be effective, but also difficult without resources and in situations where there are skills or resourcing gaps or a lack of support.
- **Local coalitions or networks of CBOs**: Forming a network that brings together CBOs in a particular local area can be useful for sharing resources and ensuring better communication between different stakeholders (e.g. communities, government representatives, NGOs, UNHCR, media). It is possible to share information and resources between refugee communities from different backgrounds that are facing common challenges.
- **Community representation on local advisory bodies**: Seeking to have diverse refugee community representatives advising NGOs or other stakeholders locally about their programs, policies and practices.

In the country where you live…

- **National refugee coalitions and networks:** Coming together as representatives from different refugee communities to be able to advocate directly at a national level. For example, it may be difficult (or there may be an unwillingness) for a central government to engage with representatives from every different refugee community across the country, but there may be a willingness to engage with a representational body that is well connected, representative and can advocate for refugee community interests more broadly.
- **Community representation on national advisory bodies**: Seeking to have diverse refugee community representatives advising NGOs, UNHCR and government at a national level about their programs, policies and practices.

In the Asia Pacific region…

- **Regional refugee-led coalition or network:** Forming a new network of refugee advocates with representation across the Asia Pacific to advocate at a regional level (e.g. ASEAN, Bali Process, UNHCR Asia Bureau). The practicalities of this would need to be considered such as: restrictions on international travel, how to bring people together to decide on who represents the network, and how to secure some resources to establish an effective network that is spread across a wide and diverse geographical area.
- **Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN):** APRRN is a network of over 320 civil society organisations and individuals from 28 countries in the Asia Pacific region committed to advancing the rights of refugees in the region through information sharing, mutual capacity building and joint advocacy (see www.aprrn.info). Refugee-led organisations, networks and leaders can join APRRN as members to collaborate in and inform advocacy.

- **APRRN Working Groups:** APRRN has geographic working groups (South Asia; East Asia; South East Asia; Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific) and thematic working groups (on Immigration Detention; Legal Aid and Advocacy; Regional Protection; Youth). It is possible for representatives from refugee-led organisations or networks as APRRN members to join existing working groups to ensure the perspectives of refugees are heard.
- **APRRN Refugee Participation and Leadership Working Group:** A new APRRN Working Group could be set up to focus on how to strengthen refugee self-representation across the network. As an APRRN working group, this would mean some small resources could be allocated by the APRRN Secretariat to better develop and strengthen refugee self-representation in the Asia Pacific region.

At an international level

- **The Global Summit of Refugees and international refugee advocacy network:** One of the outcomes of the Global Summit of Refugees that took place in Geneva in June 2018 was a decision to establish an international network for refugee-led advocacy. While the form that this network will take has yet to be decided on (this will be discussed in January by the Global Summit of Refugees Steering Committee), it is likely that such a network will provide a mechanism for refugee-led advocacy at international decision-making processes, such as at key meetings of UNHCR in Geneva.
- **Participation of community advocates in the annual UNHCR NGO Consultations:** NGOs in some parts of the Asia Pacific Region (particularly in Australia and New Zealand, but also through APRRN) have been able to support a small number of representatives from different refugee communities to participate in the annual consultation between UNHCR and NGOs in Geneva. While limited to a small number of advocates each year, these individuals have been able to provide a voice for refugee communities in the Asia Pacific Region at an international level.
- **Media and creative collaboration:** One of the indirect ways that refugees in different parts of the region are trying to influence decision-making about the needs and responses to forced displacement at an international level is through engagement with global media—both traditional media outlets and through social media. This also includes pursuing collaborations with film-makers, artists and photographers, as well as establishing relationships with journalists working for influential media outlets.

WHAT ELSE IS BEING DONE OR COULD BE DONE TO STRENGTHEN THE VOICES OF REFUGEES?
