

Regional Humanitarian Advocacy Consultation on Rohingya Displacement 15 September 2022

Summary

Many Rohingya are still living in protracted exile with unreliable access to temporary protection, essential services and durable solutions, which has led thousands to undertake perilous journeys from Myanmar and Bangladesh by sea, leading in many cases to fatalities. While the COVID-19 pandemic created new barriers to migration, as many countries tightened border controls, the number of Rohingya refugees attempting to move irregularly is again increasing, with over 1,000 Rohingya making maritime and land movements in the region in January – July 2022. Against this backdrop, 51 representatives¹ from 29 NGOs, networks, the UN and the donor community met to discuss how coordinated regional responses and advocacy can be strengthened. During the one-day consultation, humanitarian stakeholders discussed challenges and opportunities at both regional and national levels, identified themes for advocacy and opportunities for coordinated advocacy at the regional level to improve the situation for Rohingya in the region.

Key takeaways

There is a value in coordinating regional advocacy on Rohingya displacement and participants would welcome continuing to exchange within the group. There was recognition of the complementary roles that partners involved in advocacy can play and for the strength that work as a coalition brings in terms of risk mitigation.

Future advocacy approaches should be informed by lessons learned in the region. An incremental approach that promotes the exchange of good practice, small-scale (pilot) models, quiet diplomacy and one that builds on relationships that many national NGOs have established already at country level is likely to have greater impact. Participants concluded that conditionality has not been successful in advocacy in this region and that proposals for new or large-scale frameworks or the establishment of new mechanisms/forum are less likely to bear fruit. The group agreed that future advocacy at the regional level should include work with existing multi-country and inter-governmental forums or processes.

Experience has shown that within Government, the positions of different entities and individuals are not monolithic. These varying interests are being mapped and should inform our approach to identifying advocacy targets and advocacy partners.

Advocacy is also stronger when informed by evidence and the relevance of research institutions and think tanks was underlined.

Engagement with ASEAN has also shown that due to political sensitivities, advocacy is more effective when Rohingya displacement is incorporated in existing thematic discussions. In particular, those that are tabled on the formal agenda of the regional entity's work plan. An example is the work with the Commission on Women and Children to address civil registration.

Refugee-led organizations and initiatives were poorly represented at the meeting. **The importance of Rohingya involvement in advocacy initiatives was underscored by the group** and a commitment made to address this gap.

¹ See annex for list of meeting participants

There are many entry points for advocacy at the regional level and it would be helpful to routinely share information about upcoming opportunities. These include Indonesia's chairmanship of ASEAN in 2023; the OIC conference on education taking place in Kuala Lumpur; and the 20th anniversary of the Bali Process. Besides inter-governmental processes, participants also agreed that we can target key influential States, among them some of the key donors to the Rohingya response, but also development partners, the private sector, and faith-based organizations and explore ways in which we can work with these partners on advocacy.

Coordinated regional advocacy can also target global initiatives and processes. **Participants were interested in exploring how the Global Refugee Forum in 2023 might be leveraged** in work on protection and solutions for the Rohingya.

Participants identified a number of cross-cutting themes for the region that would benefit from coordinated regional-level advocacy. Public discourse on Rohingya is one of these, particularly given the potential for upcoming elections in several host countries to further aggravate negative rhetoric. Other cross-cutting topics for advocacy include strengthening resilience of Rohingya in host countries (livelihoods, education), family unity, statelessness, monitoring of ongoing human rights violations.

The group also reflected on the importance of managing donor expectations, in particular when it comes to meaningful engagement with ASEAN, which may not be formalized, large-scale or immediate in impact. Some also highlighted that multi-year programming and funding is needed to better support advocacy on Rohingya displacement.

Next steps

- Three thematic areas were identified for coordinated regional advocacy: (i) engagement with Indonesia in its capacity as future chair of ASEAN; (ii) work with the private sector; and (iii) improving public narrative on the Rohingya. It will be possible to further refine and update the thematic focus of coordinated advocacy, and participants will be able to indicate other priorities through the post-workshop survey (emailed to participants on 5 October 2022).
- Participants will indicate which issues they have capacity to work on and follow-up meetings on the thematic areas will be convened by ADSP, IOM and UNHCR. Follow-up meetings would aim to develop more concrete advocacy work plans and identify roles and timeframes.
- ADSP will establish a shared calendar of advocacy opportunities.

Annex - List of Participants

Regional	
1	Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP)
2	Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)
3	Danish Refugee Council (DRC)
4	HOST International
5	International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)
6	International Detention Coalition (IDC)
7	International Organization for Migration (IOM)
8	International Rescue Committee (IRC)
9	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
10	Save the Children
11	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
Bangladesh	
12	Bangladesh National Lawyers' Association (BNWLA)
13	BRAC
14	Eco-Social Development Organization (ESDO)
15	Rights Jessore
16	Young Power in Social Action (YPSA)
Indonesia	
17	Indonesian Civil Society Association for Refugee Rights Protection (SUAKA)
18	Indonesian Women's Association of Legal Assistance Institutions for Justice (LBH Apik)
19	Yayasan Gugah Nurani Indonesia (GNI)
20	Yayasan Kemanusiaan Madani Indonesia (YKMI)
Malaysia	
21	Asylum Access
22	Geutanyoe Foundation
23	Malaysian Relief Agency
24	Rohingya Women Development Network
25	Tzu-Chi Foundation
Thailand	
26	Department of International Relations, Chulalongkorn University
27	Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University
Donors	
28	United States
29	Australia