

**STATEMENT  
for UN Summit on Refugees & Migrants**

Burma Task Force USA is the principal program of Justice for All, a US-based NGO working to promote human rights and accredited with DPI at the United Nations. Our organizational members are major Muslim American organizations that are aware that a majority of the 65 million displaced people are Muslim—collectively we seek to have a voice in responding to this crisis. At the same time, we share concerns about all people in need regardless of religious or ethnic identity.

Our programs JFA founders began to work together in response to the genocide in Bosnia and later the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo. However, in recent years our most active program focuses on raising awareness of the anti-Muslim policies in Myanmar/Burma, and especially the protracted persecution of the Rohingya minority.

At the end of June 2016 the US State Department downgraded Myanmar's ranking on human trafficking and declared it to be among the very worst offenders. And unfortunately, the ongoing persecution of the Rohingya means that they are most vulnerable to trafficking, land grabs and other forms of exploitation.

As a civil society organization working to address the many challenges of xenophobia and promote the rights of vulnerable displaced populations, Justice for All/Burma Task Force requests that the United Nations work to strengthen international human rights norms through new mechanisms requiring nations to work together to address regional crises, including humanitarian emergencies like mass displacement. Both the EU, the African Union, and ASEAN could do more to assist nations to train refugee and migrant populations and integrate them into local economies. Funding is needed to create these accountability mechanisms and training programs.

What we must not do is warehouse human lives on isolated islands or in desert regions. The current lack of rights for refugees is a scandal. For example, only a small minority of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia and Bangladesh are registered and therefore most lack access to UN programs including opportunities for resettlement in third countries. At the same time the fundamental right to work is denied, and access to education is severely limited. On top of this WFP food aid is being reduced, which means reduced calories.

# BURMA

## TASK FORCE USA

The average number of years that refugees remain displaced is a clear sign that current programs do not integrate these millions into social and economic life of the host country.

While no resettlement program is without risk, these vulnerable populations should be seen as an asset and an investment in the future, not as a security threat.

To be sustained, humanitarian aid must be linked to both human rights protection and to development needs without putting any population at risk. At the same time, the root causes of displacement must also be addressed regionally and multilateral solutions found. Investment must be conditional on international human rights norms being recognized and implemented in countries of origin especially when government policies are complicit in forcing displacement.

While some nations may consider internal displacement as an internal matter not to be addressed internationally, the UN has an opportunity on September 19 to clarify its opposition to rendering groups and individuals stateless. Language being drafted should make this clear. If political will is lacking to protect basic human rights then political solutions must be found.

As Chair of Burma Task Force and, until recently, Chair of the Parliament of World Religions, I hope the UN will continue to challenge and engage with the government of Myanmar/Burma, and continue to recognize the Rohingya's right to self-identify despite the Burmese government's demand that their name not be used. It is disappointing that to continue to provide humanitarian aid, some UN agencies have given in to this unfair demand, so inconsistent with international norms. I take the liberty of linking our recent position paper on this subject.

Thank you for all your efforts for this important conference and especially for your work to help refugees and migrants in need around the world.

Sincerely

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