

Asia Pacific
Refugee Rights
Network

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Detention Coalition



Save the Children



Women's Education
for Advancement
and Empowerment

Thailand: Protect refugees fleeing violence and repression in Myanmar

8 April 2021

We, the undersigned organisations, call on Thailand and other governments in the Asia region to protect people fleeing violence and repression in Myanmar. As the situation in Myanmar is rapidly deteriorating, the need for safe border crossing and access to asylum is all the more urgent: no one should be pushed back to a situation where they are at risk of serious human rights violations.

Since the military coup in Myanmar on 1 February, at least 575 people have been killed by the military and police as they used increasingly violent means to repress dissent. Such repression together with renewed fighting in ethnic areas means that many in Myanmar are now forced to consider crossing borders in search of safety.

As recently as the weekend of 27-28 March, at least 4,000 people fled from Kayin (Karen) State in Myanmar across the border into Thailand, following renewed clashes between the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) and ethnic armed groups, including military air strikes. We are concerned about reports that on 29 March authorities pushed back some 2,000 of these refugees to Kayin State, despite continued air strikes in the region.

Such pushbacks could violate the principle of *non-refoulement* that forbids States from returning people to territories where they are at risk of persecution or other serious human rights violations. Forcing people to return to active conflict areas could put their lives at risk. As such, clear and systemic screening procedures should be established along the border to allow everyone fleeing to seek asylum, including with the involvement of UNHCR.

It is crucial that aid agencies are allowed unfettered access to everyone fleeing Myanmar to provide lifesaving aid and other services, including healthcare, food and water. Furthermore, steps must be taken to ensure that the longer-term needs of refugees are being met should the situation in Myanmar continue to deteriorate, making a short-term return of refugees impossible.

While any movement of people must be properly managed with rigorous public health measures in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, trying to contain the pandemic is no excuse to push people back to unsafe situations. Thai authorities and agencies should instead ensure that

adequate COVID-19 screening, quarantine and treatment facilities are available for those crossing the border.

Thailand already hosts some 92,000 refugees from Myanmar along its border provinces, and we welcome recent commitments by senior level Thai government officials to welcome and provide aid to those fleeing Myanmar. We urge the international community to support the Government of Thailand and aid agencies in these efforts, including by providing financial and political support to ensure the refugees' needs are being met and rights protected.

We furthermore call on the Myanmar military to immediately end the use of violence and abuse against civilians, whether in the context of peaceful protests or armed conflicts.

Signatories

Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network
ChildFund International
Coalition for the Rights of Refugees and Stateless Persons
International Detention Coalition
Justice for Peace Foundation
Plan International
Right To Play
Rohingya Human Rights Monitoring Network
Ruammit Foundation-DARE Network
Save the Children
Terre des Hommes Germany
The Border Consortium
WEAVE Foundation