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Rohingya in Bangladesh Preparing to Flee to Malaysia

London, UK - Burma Human Rights Network has interviewed several young Rohingya men living in refugee camps in Bangladesh who say they are preparing to flee Bangladesh by boat for Malaysia, in a similar exodus to the one witnessed in 2014 where thousands of Rohingya attempted to reach Indonesia and Malaysia by boats. Some of the men BHRN interviewed have likely left already, according to the timeline they provided. Similarly, many Rohingya living in IDP camps inside of Sittwe, Burma, have fled the country by boat in an attempt to flee to Malaysia.

A boat carrying 93 Rohingya from Sittwe was intercepted by Burmese authorities On November 27th. Many of those fleeing appear to be working with human traffickers who will entrap them in some form of modern slavery through 'loans' Rohingya are told they can pay off once they arrive in Malaysia.

"The Rohingya planning on fleeing Bangladesh are desperately trying to escape what they believe is a hopeless situation. Burma is not willing to accept them or give them even the most basic human rights, and life in Bangladesh is one confined to refugee camps with no hope for employment, education, or future. This situation is ripe for exploitation by human traffickers who see desperate people willing to risk everything for a chance at a better life," Said BHRN's Executive Director, Kyaw Win.

All of the men BHRN has interviewed thus far are in their early 20s and said their motivations for leaving were to seek a better life and to support their families. The refugees interviewed by BHRN had all recently fled from Burma due to the Military crackdown in 2017. All of them intended to go to Malaysia, typically through the Thai border, and most had no viable job prospects there.

One especially alarming detail most of those BHRN interviewed stated was that their 'brokers' or traffickers agreed to loan them part of the cost of their journey which they would be expected to pay back once they arrived in Malaysia. Typically Rohingya pay 100,000 Bangladesh Taka and are expected to repay another 200,000 once they arrive, leaving them about \$2500 in debt. In 2014 a similar scheme was worked out by human traffickers moving Rohingya to Malaysia and Thailand which forced them into work camps and modern day slavery. All indications seem to show this will happen again, and Malaysian and Thai authorities should preemptively seek to shut down any such forced labor camps or slavery schemes.

While the current exodus of the Rohingya is just beginning, it will likely continue for several months until monsoon season approaches. The international community must address the underlying root causes of this exodus while also combating modern slavery and human trafficking. Once the Rohingya have a situation they can find hope in, the market for human traffickers will be decimated. The Rohingya living in Bangladesh now need options for third-country resettlement, education and work possibilities, and the prospect of a peaceful and equitable return to Burma where they can enjoy full rights and citizenship.

Background on the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)

Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) is based in London and operates across Burma/Myanmar works for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in Burma. BHRN has played a crucial role advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

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