



Date: 26/04/2020

STATEMENT:

Concerning Current Situation Surrounding Rohingya Refugees in Malaysia

Against the backdrop of Covid-19 Pandemic in Malaysia, there has been rising vitriolic campaign by some sections of Malaysian social media users against the Rohingya refugees taking refuge in the country. Though it's difficult to say what exactly is the trigger behind the campaign, following three incidences seem to be possible triggers:

- 1) Recent arrival and subsequent pushing back of the Rohingya boat survivors,
- 2) A self-proclaimed leader of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia apparently demanding Citizenship and Equal Rights in the country
- 3) And rumors that the Rohingya refugees have dominated 'Pasar Selayang' areas and subsequently breaking the Covid-19 Lockdown rules.

The Rohingya people — survivors of Genocide by the Myanmar regime making up to merely 4 million worldwide — have been in political, economical, social and educational lockdown by the successive Myanmar regimes for more than four decades. Today, more than one million of them are living concentrated refugee camps in Bangladesh. Restricted from education and up-to-date information, they are unable to fully understand the gravity and seriousness of Covid-19 situation and following lockdowns. On top of that, misinformation by the human traffickers to coax them travel to Malaysia makes it worse. Though it's wrong to move to anywhere amidst the lockdown in most parts of the world, one could understand why the Rohingya survivors still end up at the Malaysian shores by boat or at Thai-Malaysian border.

The Rohingya survivors escaping Genocide in Myanmar end up in Malaysia for shelter and refuge. While a few of them get resettled to third countries, majority of them still have to stay in Malaysia for years/decades with the hope that they would go back to their homeland in Myanmar once it becomes peaceful, safe from danger and they are given security for their life protection. They have no intention to permanently settle in Malaysia, as far as their wishes are concerned.

Mr. Zafar Ahmed Abdul Ghani, a self-proclaimed leader of Rohingya who runs an organization named Myanmar Ethnic Rohingya Human Rights Organization Malaysia (MERHROM), apparently demanded the Citizenship and Equal Rights for the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia sparking outrage on Malaysian Social Media Platforms. He's denied several times that he didn't make such demands (through online video statements). Nevertheless, He is NOT an elected Representative, President or Ambassador of the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia.

The Rohingya refugees do not seek Malaysian citizenship nor do any right not permitted in the Malaysian Law. They may seek temporary refuge and protection (though Malaysia isn't a signatory to the UN's Refugee Convention, it has respected it all along based on humanitarian consideration) human rights and other rights bestowed under international agreements which Malaysia has ratified to such as Child Rights Convention (CRC).

Moreover, there are also growing concerns among the Malaysian people that 'Pasar Selayang' (Selayang Wholesale Wet Markets) and surrounding areas have been dominated and controlled by the Rohingya refugees. And that they are habitually breaking the laws even during the lockdown. This is factually incorrect.

Only a handful of migrants/refugees living and working in the areas are Rohingya refugees, while the majority are not. Not all Muslim groups from Myanmar are Rohingya. Besides, to the best of our knowledge, the Rohingya refugees in 'Selayang' areas are not any business owners or agents but they are just daily/monthly wage workers/labors. An in-depth field investigation report will prove that.

No one is above the law. Nor are Rohingya refugees. There are Police and other law enforcement agencies in the country. Anyone including Rohingya refugees found breaking the country's laws, swift legal actions should be taken against them.

Contrary to some unfounded allegations on Social Media and in some mainstream media, the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia as well as those resettled to third countries have been always grateful to the country and its hospitable people and will always be. They are concerned about its socio economical welfares and always pray for its well-being.

The people of Malaysia have always shown immense hospitality and solidarity to the refugees including Rohingyas and we request you to continue doing so based on humanitarian consideration. We appeal to the government of Malaysia to continue to be kind to the Rohingya Genocide survivors and provide them refuge in the country and humanitarian assistance.

We urge the local media and international media covering and reporting on the situation of the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia to be more factually correct and in depth in their reporting. A simple shallow or misreporting by the media could endanger the lives of the Genocide survivors and jeopardize their refuge in the country.

Last but not the least, we pray for and stand in solidarity with Malaysia and its people during this nationwide crisis; and socially, economically and mentally stressful situation due to Pandemic Covid-19. Thank you Malaysia! God bless you and a blessed month of Ramadhan!

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