

The plight of the Rohingya people of Myanmar (Burma)

Around the world the issue of desperate migrants and refugees seeking security or a better life by taking to the sea, often at the mercy of ruthless smugglers, has attracted growing attention. Many have died at sea.

The plight of the Rohingya people fleeing Myanmar is particularly disturbing, as they are among the most voiceless and discriminated groups in our world.

Nor is there plight a recent one. Early in 2009 hundreds of Myanmar's Rohingya people are missing at sea and many more are at risk of drowning after Thai authorities forcibly expelled large groups of Rohingya seeking refuge.

It is really only now that their plight is attracting international attention as the countries in the region struggle with formulating a response to those who have to sea. Today, also, Myanmar is a much more stable nation, with national elections and Nobel Laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, is free, which makes the plight of the Rohingya more disturbing. Moreover, not only have many perished at sea but evidence has come to light of killings by smugglers.



Background:

For the last three decades, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have fled systematic persecution to neighboring countries in Asia, the vast majority to Bangladesh. Within Myanmar, the Rohingya people suffer from specific deeply discriminatory policies targeting them, because of their Muslim faith and they are denied recognition. They are denied citizenship and are thus effectively stateless. Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar has also been a factor in inflaming sentiment against this Muslim minority.

There are about 1 million Rohingya with about 140,000 living in displacement camps where they are effectively prisoners. Those who are returned to Myanmar continue to be at serious

risk of human rights violations, including forced labour, forced eviction, land confiscation, and severe restrictions on freedom of movement.

No ethnic group in Asia is subject to such systematic discrimination.

What can we do?

We can lobby our own governments to recognize the desperate plight of the Rohingya, and to pressure Myanmar to give them legal rights and for the international community to commit economic support to the Rohingya as part of a settlement.

On May 28, the Dali Lama, urged his fellow Buddhist, Aung San Suu Kyi, to speak out forcefully on the plight of the Rohingya. Another Nobel laureate, Archbishop Tutu of South Africa has also urged her to speak. Please contact Aung Sun and urge her to use her voice for the Rohingya.

Online you can send a message through her Suu Foundation (www.suufoundation.org) You might also consider posting the letter below on her Facebook page.



**Benenson
society**

Dear Aung San,

As a member of the Benenson Society I write to express my concern over the plight of the Rohingya people. Some years ago, the Benenson Society joined so many others in campaigning for your release. We now respectfully urge you to speak out for the Rohingya.

We urge your support for the Rohingya claim to recognition as an ethnic group in Myanmar and for their being granted full citizenship. We ask that you support the release of Rohingya from displacement camps. As Myanmar moves towards elections and a full return to the international community, the eyes of many will turn to the fate of the Rohingya.

Yours sincerely,

Or you could also write or fax a letter to the local Myanmar diplomatic representative or to your own Foreign Minister urging the cause of the Rohingya.

For example, in Australia write to the Ambassador, His Excellency. U Paw Lwin Sein

Embassy of the Union of Myanmar, Canberra
22 Arkana Street, Yarralumla,
Canberra, ACT 2600
Tel: 6273 3811; 6273 3751
Fax: 02 6273 3181



Your Excellency,

As a member of the Benenson Society I write to express my concern over the plight of the Rohingya people.

We urge that the government of Myanmar acknowledge the Rohingya claim to recognition as an ethnic group in Myanmar and for their being granted full citizenship. We ask that the Government act to achieve the release of Rohingya from displacement camps. As Myanmar moves towards elections and a full return to the international community, the eyes of many will turn to the fate of the Rohingya.

Yours sincerely,