

Judul : Calls mount for RI to do more for Rohingya refugees: Myanmar coup, refugee crisis loom large over Indonesia's ASEAN chairmanship

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Myanmar coup, refugee crisis loom large over Indonesia's ASEAN chairmanship

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Civil society groups have welcomed Indonesia's decision to shelter the flurry of sea-stranded Rohingya in Aceh but also suggest that Jakarta should do more to help resolve the brewing crisis in Myanmar, which has become more dire since the military staged a coup in February 2021.

The ethnic and religious minority, who reside in parts of Myanmar but are stripped of formal rights, have long faced persecution in the country, leading to Southeast Asia's largest refugee crisis to date.

On Tuesday, Myanmar authorities sentenced 112 members of the Rohingya, including 12 children, for attempting to leave the country without legal documents, AFP reported.

This act itself comes just a few days after a boat with 184 Rohingya refugees said to be headed for Malaysia landed in Indonesia's Aceh province after an engine malfunction.

Local authorities in Aceh Besar regency have taken in and provided emergency assistance to the refugees, which included 40 minors and a pregnant woman.

"We've coordinated with the Aceh Social Affairs Agency and have obtained permission to use its building as a temporary shelter," said acting regent Muhammad Iswanto in a statement on Monday.

Sunday's arrival is the third wave of Rohingya refugees to

have landed in Aceh since Christmas 2022.

Two boats carrying over 200 Rohingya refugees arrived on Dec. 25 and 26, which prompted the Aceh Legislative Council (DPRA) to form a refugee task force to handle the influx of refugees to the province.

"We support the formation of a refugee task force in Aceh and we will discuss the logistics with the Aceh government and the central government," said DPRA Commission 1 chairman Iskandar Usman Alfaridky in a meeting last week with members of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Sr. Comr. Etiko Pamartohadi, a member of the refugee task force set up by the Office of the Coordinating Political, Legal and Security Affairs Minister, said the long-term plan was to rehome these refugees in community houses prepared for by the state.

"These community houses are located in Pekanbaru [in Riau province], Makassar [in South Sulawesi] and in other regions, but we still must coordinate with the local authorities," Etiko told *The Jakarta Post* on Tuesday.

"What's important is that for the time being, we've provided them with emergency assistance."

While welcoming the assistance of local authorities, the Indonesian Civil Society Association for the Protection of Refugee Rights (SUAKA) has encouraged the government to do more for



Reuters/Willy Kumawan

Identified: A Rohingya refugee boy holds a board as his information is collected by immigration officers at a camp in Ladong, Aceh, on Tuesday.

the Rohingya refugees.

"With Indonesia assuming the ASEAN chairmanship, the country should be more decisive in responding to the crisis in Myanmar," the group stated in a press release.

SUAKA, together with other civil societies such as Amnesty International Indonesia, jointly said as long as the situation in Myanmar remained unsolved,

more refugees would end up stranded in the region's open seas.

In 2012 and 2015, Southeast Asia was faced with a mass exodus of Rohingya refugees, which saw more than tens of thousands of the minority group stranded at sea by illicit means in an attempt to flee persecution.

Indonesia and Malaysia were among the countries who begrudgingly took in the refugees,

while most others have landed in refugee camps in Bangladesh.

While the topic was not explicitly brought up during a bilateral meeting between President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim on Monday, both leaders agreed that ASEAN could play a central role in maintaining peace in the region.

"Indonesia and Malaysia

agreed on the importance of the Five-Point Consensus and we both urge the Myanmar junta to implement it," Jokowi said on Monday.

The Myanmar coup, along with the preexisting refugee crisis that ASEAN had sought to resolve prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, looms large over Indonesia's chairmanship of the regional bloc this year. (tjs)