

Project SafeCom News and Updates

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1. SIGN THE PETITION: Australia needs to rescue the 8000 Rohingya refugees

See http://www.sarahhansonyoung.com/adrift_at_sea?recruiter_id=17294

Sarah Hanson-Young
Friday 15 May, 2015

Tell the Prime Minister that Australia needs to rescue the 8000 Rohingya refugees adrift at sea

A humanitarian emergency is unfolding in our region.

The United Nations has called for an immediate international search and rescue mission to save the lives of these people.

Australia must step up and take a leading role. As a regional leader you have an international responsibility to provide immediate assistance.

Turning a blind eye is not acceptable. We are a nation with a big heart. We must do the right thing.

We will stand up for people who need Australia's help.

See http://www.sarahhansonyoung.com/adrift_at_sea?recruiter_id=17294

2. Klaus Neumann: Boat people and gunships in the Mediterranean

The challenge is to convince European governments and civil society that there is no easy solution to irregular migration, writes Klaus Neumann. In the meantime, it's encouraging to see signs of solidarity

Inside Story
Klaus Neumann
12 May 2015

Australia might have halted the flow of "illegal maritime arrivals," as they've been designated by the Abbott government since October 2013, but in Europe the boats keep coming. And many of those who embark on dangerously overcrowded vessels from Libya and other countries in North Africa never arrive.

In Libya alone, tens of thousands of people are believed to be waiting for an opportunity to make the dangerous voyage to Europe. Some estimates put the number at one million – but as the University of Queensland's Phil Orchard has pointed out, we should be wary of figures like these. What we know for certain is that some 31,500 "boat people" arrived in Italy in the first three-and-a-half months of 2015. Another 1500 drowned trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

About 80,000 irregular migrants are accommodated in Italy's reception centres, with thousands of others living in the community. But many of those reaching Italy – or Greece, for that matter – are intent on lodging their claim for asylum in countries further to the north. Under the present EU arrangements, though, someone who arrives by boat in Italy but applies for asylum in Germany, for instance, will be sent back to Italy, which then has to deal with the asylum claim.

At least, that's how the system is meant to work. But the Italians have been known to look the other way when migrants refuse to be fingerprinted after disembarking; and without fingerprints there is no way to prove where somebody entered Europe. And even if it's certain that an asylum seeker entered Europe via Italy, he or she won't necessarily be sent back there. Last month, the Council of Aliens Law Litigation, a Belgian administrative court, ruled in favour of two asylum seekers who claimed that they shouldn't be sent back to Italy because their applications would not be handled correctly there.

A similar European Court of Human Rights ruling four years ago, in a case involving an asylum seeker sent back to Greece from Belgium, prompted several EU governments to suspend deportations of asylum seekers to Greece. Germany renewed its moratorium on such deportations four months ago because, as interior minister Thomas de Maizière told a Bundestag parliamentary committee, "The treatment of asylum seekers [in Greece] does not always meet European standards."

Full story at <http://insidestory.org.au/boat-people-and-gunships-in-the-mediterranean>

3. EU urges UN to back effort to save lives, including plans to destroy boats

ABC News Online / AFP
First posted Tue 12 May 2015, 4:07am
Updated Tue 12 May 2015, 8:17am

European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini has appealed for UN backing of Europe's efforts to confront the Mediterranean migrant crisis, including plans to destroy people smugglers' boats.

Ms Mogherini spoke at the United Nations Security Council as it prepares to endorse a controversial EU plan that provides for military action to stem the tide of refugees making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean.

"Our first priority is to save lives and prevent further loss of lives at sea," Ms Mogherini told the 15-member council. "We cannot do it alone. This has to be a common global effort. That is why we count on your support to save lives and dismantle criminal organisations that are exploiting people's desperation."

With more than 1,800 dead this year alone, 2015 is shaping up as the deadliest ever for refugees seeking to reach Europe through the Mediterranean. Describing the migrant flow as an "unprecedented situation", Ms Mogherini said: "We need an exceptional response."

Europe's chief diplomat described the migrant crisis as "not only a humanitarian emergency but also a security crisis" involving smugglers who have seized on the chaos in Libya to set up operations.

Plans to destroy people smugglers' boats

The most controversial component of the EU plan would involve military action to destroy the boats used by migrant smugglers.

UN Security Council members Britain, France, Lithuania and Spain are working with Italy on a draft resolution that would allow for the "use of all necessary means to seize and dispose of the vessels, including the destruction and rendering inoperable and unusable", diplomats said.

Russia has, however, poured cold water over the proposal to destroy vessels, arguing that smugglers rent boats from owners who are often unaware of the scheme.

"It's just going too far," Russian ambassador Vitaly Churkin said last week.

The resolution would be drafted under Chapter 7 of the UN charter which allows the use of force and would give an EU maritime force the right to act in Libyan territorial waters.

Libya has expressed reservations and it remains an open question whether the rival governments ruling the country would give their consent.

In addressing the council, Ms Mogherini offered assurances that a naval force would not seek to undermine Libya's stability.

"We don't and we won't act against anyone, but in partnership with all," she said.

Human rights and aid organisations have also come out against military action, arguing that attention should focus instead on broadening legal avenues for migrants to reach Europe.

At a summit last month, EU leaders agreed they had to act in the face of the mounting death toll, committing more money for search and rescue missions and to extend their scope.

They also tasked Ms Mogherini with drawing up a list of military options, including action to capture and destroy the smugglers' vessels.

Europe looks at refugee intake quotas

The migrant issue is hugely sensitive as the EU agonises over how best to respond, with euro-sceptic and nationalist parties capitalising on public unease over increased immigration.

On Wednesday, European Commission head Jean-Claude Juncker is due to present a new migration policy plan which includes a provision that distributes the migrant burden more fairly across the bloc.

Diplomatic sources said Mr Juncker may also set at 20,000 an EU-wide quota for refugees despite Britain insisting this should be done only on a voluntary basis.

Some European governments believe that taking in more people only makes the problem worse, arguing that it attracts other migrants into risking their lives on the risky Mediterranean crossing.

"Juncker wants a required quota of refugees but this is practically seen as a declaration of war [by certain member states]," one top European official said.

Germany, however, has argued for a humanitarian response to the disaster by spreading the refugees more fairly among member states.

In terms of the military response, diplomatic sources say current thinking would allow EU navies to board unflagged vessels in international waters in the Mediterranean to stop people traffickers, but they would not intervene before they left the Libyan coast, as the summit had suggested.

The Europeans believe they can act without a UN mandate against ships that fly no flag, which enjoy less protection under the law of the sea.

But they would need the UN's approval to go into Libyan territorial waters.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-12/eu-urges-un-to-back-effort-to-save-mediterranean-migrant-lives/6461952>

4. UK Minister in battle with Europe over demand to take 60,000 asylum seekers

Tories 'will veto EU plan to make us take more Med migrants': Minister in battle with Europe over demand to take 60,000 asylum seekers

The Daily Mail, Australia

By James Slack, Home Affairs Editor for the Daily Mail

Published: 08:27 EST, 12 May 2015

Updated: 01:07 EST, 13 May 2015

Tory ministers were last night refusing demands for Britain to take a quota of 60,000 asylum seekers in their first post-election battle with the EU.

The European Commission wants member states to take a share of the migrants who are pouring into Europe after making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean.

The idea is backed by Germany, the key Brussels power broker which received 200,000 asylum applications last year.

Italy, Malta, Austria and Greece, where large numbers of migrants arrive, also argue that Britain is not taking its fair share.

But ministers, led by Home Secretary Theresa May, are refusing to agree to the request, which will be formally made by Brussels tomorrow.

Mrs May argues that many of the new arrivals are economic migrants rather than refugees fleeing wars in Libya and Syria.

In many cases, they have travelled across Africa to start the journey from Libya – where order has broken down following the toppling of dictator Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

The EU cannot force Britain to take a quota – which would see the number of people seeking asylum here each year double from 30,000 – as the UK has an opt-out on edicts relating to asylum and immigration.

However, it is likely to increase tensions at a time when Britain wants the EU to agree to renegotiate the wider terms of our membership ahead of an in-out referendum in 2017.

France yesterday backed the quota proposals, with interior minister Bernard Cazeneuve saying: 'It's reasonable that there should be a redistribution of the numbers in the EU.'

Earlier this month, Mrs May disputed the idea that all the Mediterranean migrants were asylum seekers fleeing conflict zones, saying: 'The issue is perceived as being people who are refugees from Syria.'

Full story at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3077434/Tories-veto-EU-plan-make-Med-migrants-Minister-battle-Europe-demand-60-000-asylum-seekers.html>

5. European Union announces plans for migrant quotas, Britain opts out

ABC News Online / Reuters

First posted Thu 14 May 2015, 3:18am

Updated Thu 14 May 2015, 4:54am

The European Union has announced a plan to distribute asylum seekers more fairly around its member states and take in 20,000 more refugees, but Britain's newly re-elected Conservative leaders have rejected any quota system imposed from Brussels.

Shocked by thousands of deaths among people trying to reach Europe from North Africa across the Mediterranean, the EU is trying to put in place a fairer way to resettle asylum-seekers at a time when anti-immigration parties are on the rise. Italy and other southern European countries are clamouring for help to relieve the influx.

Germany, Sweden, Austria and others are favoured destinations for migrants who, once ashore, travel across the bloc's open borders to claim asylum. Those states have asked to spread those requests more evenly.

The European Commission stressed that it was proposing only a provisional emergency response to an accelerating movement that saw more than 600,000 people, many fleeing hunger and war in Africa and the Middle East, seek refuge in the EU last year.

But the proposal of mandatory quotas, based on states' population and national income but also on unemployment levels and past acceptance of refugees, has put some governments on the defensive. In particular it is facing criticism from Britain, where prime minister David Cameron was re-elected on a promise to curb immigration from the EU before holding a referendum by 2017 on quitting the bloc.

Even before the EU announced its plan, British interior minister Theresa May wrote in a newspaper column that London would use its exemptions from EU migration laws to stay out of the system. "Such an approach would only ... encourage more people to put their lives at risk," she wrote.

EU anger over British criticism

Frans Timmermans, the Dutch deputy head of the EU executive, who is expected to play a key role in negotiating with Mr Cameron ahead of the British referendum, was visibly irritated by the suggestion that the Commission's plan was counter-productive.

"I have the highest regard for British intelligence but I'm not sure Theresa May had read all the proposals we've made," he told a news conference after presenting the plan.

He noted that it also included tightening border controls, working with African states to curb people smuggling networks, naval operations against trafficking vessels and doing more to ensure people were deported if their asylum claim was rejected.

"I wonder how anyone can maintain that this would make the situation worse," Mr Timmermans said.

Ireland also opted out but plans to take in as many refugees as the system would have allocated to it.

Denmark, the third state enjoying exemptions, said it would follow its own policy.

Without naming Britain, Germany's migration minister accused London of running scared of right-wingers.

"The answer to rising numbers of refugees cannot be to reject a joint asylum policy for fear of strengthening populists," Aydan Ozoguz said.

"Each member state has a legal and moral obligation to do its duty."

Some 51,000 migrants have entered Europe by crossing the Mediterranean sea this year, with 30,500 coming via Italy.

About 1,800 have drowned in the attempt, the UN refugee agency says.

European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker argued that Europe needed immigrants to refresh its ageing population.

Britain wants the bloc to do more to target people smugglers in Libya.

EU foreign ministers are expected to approve on Monday plans for a naval and air mission to seize smugglers' vessels.

But a program with a wide scope is waiting for a UN Security Council resolution the EU hopes it can have by Monday.

The resolution would authorise the EU to intervene on the high seas, in Libyan territorial waters and coastal areas.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-14/eu-plans-migrant-quotas-britain-opts-out/6468266>

6. EU threatens May over migrant quota: Brussels threatens retaliation for refusal to accept asylum seekers

The Daily Mail, UK

By James Slack, Home Affairs Editor for the Daily Mail

Published: 10:06 EST, 14 May 2015

Updated: 17:29 EST, 14 May 2015

Britain's row with Europe escalated last night as Brussels threatened retaliation for the Government refusing to accept a strict quota of asylum seekers.

Theresa May drew a red-line by insisting the UK would play no formal part in an EU scheme to relocate the thousands of migrants who have made perilous boat journeys across the Mediterranean.

The Home Secretary also insisted there should be no bar on forcibly sending failed asylum claimants home – pointing out many of them were 'economic migrants'.

The European Commission conceded that it could not force Britain to play a part in any of its resettlement schemes because the UK has a long-standing opt-out.

But, in what was seen as a shot across Britain's bows, the Commission said it was considering changing the 'legal parameters' of the so-called Dublin Convention to 'achieve a fairer distribution of asylum seekers in Europe'.

Under Dublin, migrants must claim asylum in the first EU country they arrive in. Any who subsequently make a second claim in another member state can be sent back.

The Commission's threat means Britain could be left unable to remove asylum seekers who had already tried their luck in countries such as Greece, Italy or France.

Diplomatic sources said the EU was trying to 'rattle Britain's cage', but they insisted any changes to Dublin would have far less impact than if Mrs May had signed up to the quota system – which could have led to Britain taking up to 60,000 asylum claimants a year.

Since 2003, the Home Office has been removing only 1,000 a year under the Dublin Convention. One source said: 'If the choice is between Dublin and having to take an unspecified and unpredictable quota decided by the EU, I will go for ditching Dublin.'

The row is heightening tensions between the Government and EU at a time when David Cameron is beginning negotiations over an in/out EU referendum.

European Commission vice-president Frans Timmermans said: 'It is not acceptable for people around the EU to say, "Yes, stop people dying in the Mediterranean", and at the same time remain silent when the question is raised, "What should happen to these people?".'

But Mrs May said while the situation in the Med was 'intolerable', the quota system would only encourage more people to make the journey. She emphatically rejected an assurance given by the EU that no migrants intercepted at sea 'will be sent back against their will'.

Britain disputes the claim that it does not voluntarily play its part. Last year, it gave asylum to 14,065 people, putting the country fifth after Germany, on 47,555.

Several large EU states gave asylum to only a few hundred each. Spain accepted 1,600, Poland 740, Ireland 495, Portugal 40 and Luxembourg 135.

Tory MEP Timothy Kirkhope said: 'True solidarity cannot be created through compulsion alone, and binding quotas oversimplify the solution for such a complex situation.'

'There needs to be a clear differentiation between economic migrants and those seeking genuine asylum in order for Europe's asylum approach to work effectively and efficiently.'

Senior immigration sources said the Dublin Convention had not been working for Britain.

The courts have ruled that, on human rights grounds, it is unfair to send asylum seekers back to Greece because the prisons are in a poor state.

Meanwhile, the French and Italian authorities have been 'conveniently' failing to fingerprint asylum seekers. This makes it impossible for Britain to prove that is where they first made their claim.

Italy's interior minister Angelino Alfano said: 'The Dublin 'wall' could fall if we reach approval of obligatory quotas for migrants that each country must take in.'

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3080797/EU-threatens-migrant-quota-Brussels-threatens-retaliation-refusal-accept-asylum-seekers.html>

7. 1,400 Rohingya migrants rescued off coasts of Malaysia and Indonesia

More than 1,000 people land in Malaysia after being dumped by people traffickers and the number is expected to grow, police say

The Guardian
Agence France-Presse
Monday 11 May 2015 14.18 AEST

Four boats carrying 1,400 Rohingya migrants were rescued off the coasts of Indonesia and Malaysia on Monday, officials said, a day after nearly 600 others arrived in a wooden vessel off Aceh in Indonesia.

All the boats appeared to have been abandoned as Thailand cracks down on the trafficking of ethnic Rohingya Muslims bound for neighbouring countries following the discovery of dozens of remains in mass graves at "slave camps" in the Thai south.

More than 1,000 migrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar landed in Malaysia after being dumped by people traffickers in shallow waters off the resort island of Langkawi, police said.

"We think there were three boats that ferried 1,018 migrants," said Langkawi's deputy police chief, Jamil Ahmed. He said the number was expected to grow as more migrants were picked up around the island.

Early on Monday, Indonesian search and rescue teams discovered another boat drifting off east Aceh with 400 men, women and children from Myanmar and Bangladesh aboard, Aceh provincial search and rescue chief Budiawan said.

Authorities are bracing for further arrivals and have recruited fishermen to assist in patrolling the coast of the remote western Indonesian province. "We are on standby and ready to rescue them when we receive an alert," Budiawan said.

Buddhist-majority Myanmar views its population of roughly 800,000 Rohingya as illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, and they have been targeted in outbreaks of sectarian violence there in recent years, prompting many to flee.

Thousands have braved the dangerous sea crossing from Myanmar to southern Thailand and beyond in the hope of reaching mainly Muslim Malaysia, but many often fall prey to people-traffickers in Thailand.

Chris Lewa from the Arakan Project, a Rohingya rights group, said she believed thousands of migrants were trapped at sea following crackdowns on trafficking in Thailand as well as in Malaysia in recent months.

"Thailand has tried to prevent traffickers from continuing their business ... so that has forced them to go somewhere else," she said. "Brokers have been using ships as a camp.

"They're just trying to disembark before they die," she said of migrants perishing on boats without food, adding she expected many more to appear on Indonesian shores.

Boatloads of Rohingya have arrived off Aceh in the past, typically after becoming lost or running out of fuel.

But Indonesian officials said the first group which arrived near a beach in north Aceh early Sunday were tricked and told to swim to land.

"One of the migrants who could speak Malay told me that their agent had told them they were in Malaysia, and to swim to shore," Darsa, a disaster management agency official, said.

Indonesian authorities on Monday revised the number of migrants aboard the first boat which arrived in north Aceh at the weekend to 573, from an initial figure of about 500.

"This number could get bigger as we are still processing the data," north Aceh police chief Achmadi said.

Darsa said there were 83 women and 41 children on board. One of the women was pregnant and some of the children were aged under 10. "Some of them were not doing too well and needed medical attention," he said.

One Muslim Rohingya aboard that vessel told journalists in north Aceh that the group had boarded the boat in Thai

land and were heading to Malaysia before the traffickers abandoned them at sea with little fuel.

Achmadi said many of those brought to shore complained of hunger and illness and were taken to clinics for treatment.

The bulk of those migrants were being kept at a sports centre, but others are staying in the homes of local residents, he added.

The boatload that arrived in east Aceh early Monday was also receiving food and medical care as immigration authorities begin processing their cases.

The UN considers the Rohingya to be one of the world's most persecuted minorities.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/11/second-boat-off-indonesia-brings-asylum-seekers-rescued-in-two-days-to-1000>

8. Hundreds of Bangladeshi, Rohingya refugees arrive in Malaysia and Indonesia after Thai crackdown

ABC News Online

Reuters/AFP

First posted Tue 12 May 2015, 4:39am

Updated Tue 12 May 2015, 11:31am

Malaysia has detained more than a thousand Bangladeshi and Rohingya refugees, including dozens of children, police say, a day after authorities rescued hundreds stranded off Indonesia's western tip.

There has been a huge increase in refugees from impoverished Bangladesh and Myanmar drifting on boats to Malaysia and Indonesia in recent days since Thailand, usually the first destination in the region's people smuggling network, announced a crackdown on trafficking.

More than 100 refugees from these countries were found wandering around in southern Thailand last week, apparently having been abandoned by smugglers.

On Tuesday, a boat carrying about 400 migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh was towed out of Indonesian waters, an Indonesian navy spokesman said.

The navy confirmed it had provided the boat with fuel and towed it out of Indonesian waters.

"It was towed out of Indonesian territory," Manahan Simorangkir said.

"We gave them fuel and asked them to proceed. We are not forcing them to go to Malaysia nor Australia. That is not our business. Our business is they don't enter Indonesia because Indonesia is not the destination."

It declined to say if the boat was heading to Malaysia, its suspected destination.

An estimated 25,000 Bangladeshis and Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar boarded rickety smugglers' boats in the first three months of this year, twice as many in the same period of 2014, UN refugee agency UNHCR said.

Most land in Thailand, where they are held by the smugglers in squalid jungle camps until relatives pay a ransom.

Police on the north-west Malaysian island of Langkawi, close to the Thai border, said three boats had arrived in the middle of the night to unload refugees, who were taken into custody as they came ashore at the weekend.

One boat was discovered after it got stuck on a breakwater, but the other two vessels escaped.

There was no immediate word on the crew.

The boats contained 555 Bangladeshis and 463 Rohingya, who were being handed over to the immigration department, local police chief Harrith Kam Abdullah said.

Magnet for migrants

Malaysia, one of South-East Asia's wealthier economies, has long been a magnet for illegal immigrants.

On Sunday, nearly 600 migrants thought to be Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshis were rescued from at least two overcrowded wooden boats stranded off Indonesia's Aceh province, believing they had landed in Malaysia, authorities said.

The boats were towed to shore by fishermen after running out of fuel. Among the refugees were nearly 100 women and dozens of children.

Thai police spokesman Lieutenant General Prawut Thawornsiri said the crackdown in people smuggling had prompted the rush of arrivals elsewhere.

"Yes, our crackdown is affecting the boats," he told Reuters news agency in Bangkok.

"They are going to Indonesia. Why else would they go to Indonesia? It is so far ... our job is to block the boats and not let them land on our shores."

Thai prime minister Prayuth Chan-ocha ordered a clean-up of suspected traffickers' camps after 33 bodies, believed to be of migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh, were found in shallow graves in the south, near the Malaysian border.

Of those rescued off Indonesia, about 50 were taken to hospital. "In general, they were suffering from starvation and many were very thin," North Aceh police chief Achmadi said.

The refugees were being held in a gymnasium in the town of Lhoksukon, about 20 kilometres from where they were brought ashore.

'You got what you paid for'

"We are hearing the passengers were left close to shore and were told that this is Malaysia and 'you got what you paid for'," head of the International Organisation for Migration in Indonesia, Mark Getchell, said.

"They came onshore and found out it wasn't Malaysia."

An agency official estimated that about 300 people had died at sea in the first quarter of this year as a result of starvation, dehydration and abuse by boat crews.

Mohammad Kasim, a 44-year-old Bangladeshi migrant on one of the boats, said each passenger paid 4,400 ringgit (\$1,544) for the journey.

Three people died on the way and were dumped in the sea.

"I worked in Malaysia for three years in construction when I was 16," he said.

"I wanted to go back because it is very difficult to find work in Bangladesh."

Mr Kasim said he had left the Bangladesh town of Bogra a month ago on a small boat with 30-40 others in the hope of finding a job in Malaysia.

An agency in Bogra helped arrange the trip.

The group landed on a beach in Thailand, where they stayed for 21 days before leaving on a larger ship with hundreds of passengers.

In Bangladesh, where the authorities are trying to stamp out the crisis at its source, police say they have arrested more than 100 people traffickers in recent months.

Mohammad Aatur Rahman Khandaker, a senior police officer in Teknaf, close to the Myanmar border, said on Friday and Sunday, four "notorious" traffickers had been killed in gun fights with police.

He also said three people suspected of smuggling thousands of people had been arrested in the town.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-12/refugees-arrive-in-malaysia-and-indonesia-after-thai-crackdown/6461980>

9. Fears up to 6,000 asylum seekers are trapped at sea off south-east Asia

International groups worry that boats will soon land with dead bodies on board as Rohingyas and Bangladeshis flee poverty and discrimination

The Guardian
Staff and Associated Press
Tuesday 12 May 2015 13.20 AEST

As many as 6,000 asylum seekers in south-east Asia may be trapped at sea in crowded, wooden boats, and activists warn of potentially dangerous conditions as food and clean water runs low.

Even though hundreds of people abandoned at sea by smugglers have reached land and relative safety in the past two days, thousands of Bangladeshis and Rohingya Muslims from Burma are believed still at risk.

Worried that boats will start washing to shore with dead bodies, the UN high commissioner for refugees, the US and several other governments and international organisations have held emergency meetings, but participants say there are no immediate plans to search for vessels in the busy Malacca Strait.

One of the concerns is what to do with the Rohingya if a rescue is launched.

The minority group is denied citizenship in Burma, and other countries have long worried that opening their doors to a few would result in an unstoppable flow of poor, uneducated migrants.

"These are people in desperate straits," said Phil Robertson, of Human Rights Watch in Bangkok. He called on governments to band together to help those still stranded at sea, some for two months or longer. "Time is not on their side," he said.

For decades the Rohingya have suffered state-sanctioned discrimination in Buddhist-majority Burma, which considers them illegal settlers from Bangladesh even though their families have lived there for generations.

In the past three years attacks on the religious minority, numbering about 1.3m, have left up to 280 people dead and forced 140,000 from their homes. They live in crowded camps just outside the Rakhine state capital, Sittwe, where they have little access to school or adequate health care.

The conditions at home – and lack of jobs – have sparked one of the biggest exoduses of boat people since the Vietnam war.

Chris Lewa, director of the non-profit Arakan project, which has been monitoring boat departures and arrivals for more than a decade, estimates more than 100,000 men, women and children have boarded ships since mid-2012.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/12/fears-up-to-6000-south-east-asian-boat-people-are-abandoned-at-sea>

10. Thailand, Malaysia may set up camps for influx of migrants; at least 8,000 believed to be adrift at sea

ABC News Online / wires

By South-East Asia correspondent Samantha Hawley, wires

First posted Tue 12 May 2015, 7:17pm

Updated Wed 13 May 2015, 6:15am

Thailand and Malaysia may set up camps to shelter hundreds of refugees arriving on their shores, officials say, after reports that at least 8,000 people are still adrift at sea.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said these refugees are from Myanmar and Bangladesh and called on south-east Asian governments to rescue thousands of them.

"Up to 8,000 people are at sea, of which more than 1,000 have landed," IOM spokesman Joe Lowry said.

"We believe there are no more departures from the Bay of Bengal because of a crackdown by Thai authorities but those who are still at sea have been there for weeks or even months."

Thailand's Bangkok Post reported national police chief Somyot Pumpunmuang had proposed setting up official camps, although he conceded the plan might only attract more refugees.

Malaysian officials are struggling to deal with the sudden surge of refugees.

"We have room at the detention centre now, but if it is insufficient the ministry has the power to declare a new detention centre," deputy interior minister Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar said.

"This is the first time there is such a big influx of people coming into the country.

"We were told that it was the result of borders set up by the Thai authorities, so we need to find that out as well, whether Malaysia was their final destination."

There has been a sharp increase in refugees arriving from impoverished Bangladesh and Myanmar to Malaysia and Indonesia following a crackdown on trafficking by Thailand.

Bangkok is usually the first destination in the region's people-smuggling network.

Human rights groups concerned for asylum seekers

Mr Lowry from IOM said tackling the problem of migrants arriving by sea is "a regional effort".

"We don't have the capacity to search for them, but governments do, they have boats and satellites ... the journeys are long and a long time at sea isn't good for humans ... they need to be found," he said.

He said the refugees may be in a "very bad condition or even dead" if not found soon.

The United Nations refugee agency echoed the deepening concerns over the condition of those still on the boats

"From survivors we hear there is very little food and water to begin with," UNHCR spokesperson Vivian Tan said.

"If they have been there for weeks or months there is a concern that people come in severely sick."

On Tuesday, Indonesia turned back one boat believed to be carrying around 400 mainly Rohingya Muslims, after giving them fuel, food and water.

Three other boats washed up near the Malaysian holiday island of Langkawi at the weekend.

It is believed the boats had been destined for Thailand, but have been unable to dock because of a crackdown on people smuggling by the Thai military.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-12/thailand-malaysia-may-set-up-camps-for-influx-of-refugees/6464622>

11. Indonesia's foreign ministry denies claims of turning back asylum seeker boats

ABC News Online

By Indonesia correspondent George Roberts

Posted Thu 14 May 2015, 8:00am

Indonesia says the country's navy gave supplies to asylum seekers trying to reach Malaysia, and did not push them back out to sea as had been reported.

A boat carrying about 350 Rohingya asylum seekers was intercepted by an Indonesian patrol boat in the Malacca Strait, between Indonesia and Malaysia.

The asylum seekers were reportedly pushed back out to sea, but Indonesia's foreign ministry has denied that was the case, saying Indonesia respects the principle of non-refoulement, or not returning people to potential harm.

The ministry's spokesman Arrmanatha Nasir said those on board wanted to get to Malaysia but had run out of supplies.

Mr Arrmanatha said the navy provided food, fuel and clean water, and the boat was allowed right of passage through Indonesian waters.

Indonesia's foreign ministry has denied reports the country's navy towed a boat carrying asylum seekers back out to sea.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-14/indonesias-foreign-ministry-denies-turning-back-refugee-boats/6468864>

12. Malaysia tells thousands of Rohingya refugees to 'go back to your country'

Minister says his country is unwilling to accept boatloads of people fleeing poverty and persecution in Bangladesh and Burma

The Guardian

Beh Lih Yi in Jakarta

Wednesday 13 May 2015 17.46 AEST

Malaysia said on Wednesday it would no longer accept new arrivals of ethnic minority Rohingya fleeing persecution in Burma, as the UN refugee agency expressed surprise that south-east Asian nations were now turning back boats.

Up to 8,000 impoverished Bangladeshi migrants and Rohingya asylum seekers are still believed to be stranded at sea close to Malaysia and Indonesia.

Nearly 2,000 were rescued from abandoned people-smuggling boats in the two countries at the weekend.

One vessel that reached Indonesian waters early on Monday was turned away by the country's navy after being given supplies and directions to Malaysia.

Malaysia's deputy home minister, Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar, however, said his country would use tough measures, including turning back asylum-seeker boats and deportation in order to send the "right message".

"We don't want them to come here," the deputy minister said. His ministry oversees the police and immigration agencies.

"We are not prepared to accept that number coming into our shores and those people who are already in, we are sending them home anyway.

"I would like them to be turned back and ask them to go back to their own country. We cannot tell them we are welcoming them."

He said Malaysia would only consider rescuing asylum seekers on humanitarian grounds if their boats had capsized. He added that a meeting will be convened soon involving Burma and Bangladeshi embassy officials to discuss how to send the migrants back.

His statement signals a change in stance for authorities in Muslim-majority Malaysia, which in the past quietly tolerated the arrival of Rohingya, a persecuted Muslim minority in predominantly Buddhist Burma.

For many Rohingyas, relatively affluent Malaysia came to be seen as one of the last safe havens in a region where many countries have been cracking down on boat people in recent years.

Rohingya asylum seekers in Malaysia were given documents issued by the UN refugee agency, acknowledging their need to be protected, although the country is not a signatory to the UN refugee convention. While they are not officially allowed to work, authorities turn a blind eye to those working in the informal sector.

International groups have expressed concern at the south-east Asian nations' decision to turn away migrant boats, a controversial practice that has been used by Australia against immigrants seeking to reach its shores and has sparked heated debate.

"UNHCR is surprised at reports of Indonesia turning back one of the boats," its Bangkok-based regional spokeswoman Vivian Tan said. "Such a practice is inconsistent with Indonesia's search-and-rescue efforts to date, which have focused on saving lives.

"We continue to appeal to countries in the region to share responsibility and avert a humanitarian crisis."

Some of the estimated 8,000 Bangladeshi and Rohingya boat people have been on the perilous sea journey since early March and are in urgent need of medical treatment to save their lives, International Organisation for Migration Asia-Pacific spokesman Joe Lowry said.

The 1,158 migrants who are held on Malaysia's Langkawi island appeared "hungry and tired" when they were rescued, according to Langkawi police chief Harith Kam Abdullah.

He said they face deportation once the immigration authorities complete their investigation, and that Malaysia is stepping up sea patrols along its borders "to prevent any further illegal encroachment into Malaysian waters".

The sudden jump in the number of migrants stuck at sea comes after Thailand cracked down on people-smuggling networks following the grim discovery of mass graves along the Thai-Malaysia border, a traditional route for the Rohingya.

About 25,000 Bangladeshis and Rohingya boarded rickety smugglers' boats in the first three months of this year, almost double the number in the same period of 2014, according to a UNHCR report released last week.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/13/malaysia-tells-thousands-of-rohingya-refugees-to-go-back-to-your-country>

13. Malaysia to follow Indonesia in turning back migrant boats; thousands may face starvation at sea

ABC News Online / AFP / Reuters
First posted Wed 13 May 2015, 12:44pm
Updated Wed 13 May 2015, 1:10pm

Malaysia has joined Indonesia in vowing to turn back vessels ferrying a wave of migrants to south-east Asian shores, days after hundreds of hungry and weak migrants were rescued from its waters.

About 2,000 Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar and impoverished Bangladeshi migrants were rescued off the coasts of Indonesia and Malaysia earlier this week, amidst growing concern of people-smuggler ships at sea.

The rickety boats appear to have been bound for Thailand, where the discovery of mass migrant graves in "slave camps" has prompted the government to crack down on human trafficking.

Migrant groups have urged regional authorities to act quickly to avert a humanitarian catastrophe and said the crackdown has stranded possibly thousands of men, women and children at sea aboard overcrowded vessels.

Malaysia said it would turn away boats entering its waters, except if they were in imminent danger of sinking.

"The policy has always been to escort them out of Malaysian waters after giving them the necessary provisions" including fuel, water and food, First Admiral Tan Kok Kwee of the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency said.

The Indonesian navy confirmed it had turned around a boat carrying about 400 people, after providing it with fuel and food.

The navy declined to say if the boat was heading to Malaysia.

Thousands more face months at sea

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Rohingya advocacy group the Arakan Project said up to 8,000 people could still be adrift, with limited food and water.

The Arakan Project said it had spoken by phone with passengers aboard one vessel carrying 350 people, who said they were abandoned by their Thai smugglers.

"They told us they have had no food and water for the last three days. They have called for urgent rescue," Chris Lewa, the group's founder, said.

Thailand has called for a May 29 regional summit to address what it called an "unprecedented increase" in arrivals of ethnic Rohingya refugees from Myanmar and impoverished Bangladeshi migrants.

The country's disruption of smuggling networks came after the UN refugee agency reported a surge in migrants leaving Bay of Bengal ports.

It said 25,000 had embarked from January to March, double the rate seen in the same period last year.

Bangladeshi authorities said they seized a fishing trawler filled with 116 of its nationals in the Bay of Bengal near Myanmar on Tuesday.

"They have been on the boat from 15 days to three months," coastguard station commander Dickson Chowdhury said.

"For the last seven days some of them have not eaten anything other than water. Some were found in emaciated condition," he said.

Survivor recounts ordeal at sea

Thousands of Rohingya people, who are denied citizenship by Buddhist-majority Myanmar, flee annually to escape discrimination and sectarian violence that has targeted them in recent years.

Muhammad Shorif, a 16-year-old Rohingya from Myanmar, fled the squalor of a refugee camp in hopes of reaching relatively prosperous Malaysia before arriving in Indonesia's Aceh region.

He said he spent a month aboard a smuggling ship jammed with hundreds of others who survived on meagre rations and faced beatings from armed smugglers.

"Six people on our boat died due to illness and hunger, and the captain ordered that their bodies be thrown to the sea," he said.

He and hundreds of others came ashore in Aceh after smugglers left them on the boat to fend for themselves.

The IOM has said search-and-rescue operations are urgently needed to find stricken migrant boats.

"It needs a regional effort... we don't have the capacity to search for them, but governments do," Joe Lowry, a Bangkok-based spokesman for the IOM, said.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-13/malaysia-to-turn-back-migrant-boats/6466726>

14. Malaysia turns back migrant boat with more than 500 on board

Boat full of Rohingya Muslims and Bangladeshis given fuel and provisions and told they are not welcome

The Guardian
Associated Press
Thursday 14 May 2015 11.15 AEST

Malaysia has turned away a boat with more than 500 Rohingya Muslims and Bangladeshis after providing them with fuel and provisions, a government official said Thursday.

The boat was found Wednesday off the coast of northern Penang state, just days after more than 1,000 refugees landed in nearby Langkawi island.

Deputy home minister Wan Junaidi Jaafar said that Malaysia cannot afford to have immigrants flooding its shores, adding the government has treated immigrants humanely but "now it's about time to show they are not welcome here".

He said countries in south-east Asian must now press Myanmar to resolve the Rohingya crisis.

Thousands of migrants are still believed stranded in the Malacca Strait and surrounding waters, after captains tied to trafficking networks abandoned ships, leaving behind their human cargo.

Indonesia, which has taken 600 such refugees, turned a boat away earlier this week. But a foreign ministry spokesman denied Wednesday it had a "push back" policy, saying the vessel strayed into its waters on accident. Arrmanatha Nasir told reporters the migrants were looking for neighbouring Malaysia.

"We have to help refugees who need assistance and direct them to where they want to go," he said. "It goes against our principle to chase away refugee boats that enter our territory."

South-east Asia, which for years tried to quietly ignore the plight of Myanmar's 1.3 million Rohingya, now finds itself caught in a spiralling humanitarian crisis that in many ways it helped create.

In the last three years, more than 100,000 members of the Muslim minority have boarded ships, fleeing persecution, according to the United Nations refugee agency.

No countries want them, fearing that accepting a few would result in an unstoppable flow of poor, uneducated migrants. But governments at the same time respected the wishes of Myanmar at regional gatherings and avoided discussions of state-sponsored discrimination against the Rohingya.

Denied citizenship by national law, the Muslims are effectively stateless. They have for years faced attacks by the military and extremist Buddhist mobs. They have limited access to education or adequate healthcare and cannot move around freely.

"Towing migrants out to sea and declaring that they aren't your problem anymore is not a solution to a wider regional crisis," said Charles Santiago, a member of parliament in Malaysia.

Increasingly over the years, Rohingya boarding boats in the Bay of Bengal have been joined by neighbouring Bangladeshis, most of them seeking an escape from poverty.

For those fleeing, the first stop, up until recently, was Thailand, where migrants were held in jungle camps until their families could raise hefty ransoms so they could continue onward. Recent security crackdowns forced the smugglers to change tactics, instead holding people on large ships parked offshore.

Initially they were shuttled to shore on smaller boats after their "ransoms" were paid. But as agents and brokers on land got more and more spooked by arrests not just of traffickers but also police and politicians, they went into hiding.

That created a bottleneck, with migrants stuck on boats for weeks, even months, at a time.

Chris Lewa of the non-profit Arakan Project estimates as many as 6,000 may still be on boats, waiting to find a chance to land or hoping to be rescued.

In recent days, captains have started abandoning their ships, leaving passengers to fend for themselves.

The UN has pleaded for countries in the region to keep their borders open and help rescue those stranded. Several navies said they were scouring the seas.

Captain Chayut Navespootikorn of the Royal Thai Navy of Operation Fleet Area 3, said several boats and aircraft had been deployed to search the country's territorial waters, but nothing has turned up.

No rescues have been made by other navies either.

The condition of people on the ship off Penang was not immediately known, said Zafar Ahmad, who heads the Myanmar Ethnic Rohingya Human Rights Organisation of Malaysia: "We are hearing their plight is desperate."

The information was corroborated by another person with knowledge of the situation. That person was not authorised to speak to the media and asked to remain anonymous. Government officials could not immediately be reached for comment.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/14/malaysia-turns-back-migrant-boat-with-more-than-500-aboard>

15. Malaysia turns away two vessels carrying about 600 migrants; another boat arrives in Thailand

ABC News Online / wires

First posted Thu 14 May 2015, 6:45pm

Updated Thu 14 May 2015, 7:40pm

Malaysia has turned away two vessels carrying a combined 600 migrants, an official who spoke on condition of anonymity said on Thursday.

The boats were intercepted off the northern Malaysian islands of Penang and Langkawi and told they could not land.

"Last night, one boat was pushed back after it entered Malaysian waters off Penang and one more boat was prevented from entering Langkawi waters," the official said.

The boat off Penang was given supplies of bottled water before it was sent away.

Malaysian officials, however, could not confirm media reports of the boats being pushed back to sea. "We don't have any information," Abdul Aziz Yusoff, commander of the marine operations force, said.

Another boat crammed with scores of Rohingya migrants — including many young children — was found drifting in Thai waters on Thursday but was declined permission to land.

"About 10 people died during the journey. We threw their bodies into the water," one migrant shouted in Rohingya to a boat carrying reporters.

"There are 300 of us ... we have been at sea for two months. We want to go to Malaysia but we have not reached there yet."

"We declined them entry to the country but we gave them food and water to adhere to our human rights obligations," said regional police official Major General Puttichat Akhachan.

'Sending the right signal'

Malaysia had said it would push back boats bearing migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh, most of them Rohingya.

"We are sending them the right signal, to send them to where they came from," deputy home minister Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar said.

"Their country is not at war. If there is nothing wrong with the ship, they should sail back to their own country."

Indonesia, meanwhile, has denied reports that its navy towed a boat carrying migrants back out to sea on Tuesday.

Foreign ministry spokesman Arrmanatha Nasir said the people on the boat were trying to get to Malaysia and asked for food, water and fuel.

Mr Nasir said the navy gave provisions and left them to have right of passage through the strait.

The navies of both Thailand and Indonesia said their policy was to offer food and water to migrants on Wednesday and not to send boats back out to sea.

But Thai government officials said the country was not receiving boatpeople which is why they are arriving in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Humanitarian crisis brewing

Earlier this week, nearly 2,000 people were rescued or swum to Malaysian shores following a Thai police crackdown which disrupted well-worn people-smuggling routes.

The UN refugee agency said several thousand migrants had been abandoned at sea by smugglers and warned the situation could develop into a "massive humanitarian crisis".

An estimated 25,000 Bangladeshis and Rohingya boarded rickety smugglers' boats in the first three months of this year, twice as many in the same period of 2014, according to the latest UN data.

Malaysia said the UNHCR should find another country for the migrants.

"I don't see why we are under pressure," Mr Wan said.

"We are doing what we think we should do. We have to consider what our people want to see us doing. They don't want to see immigrants come into our country."

Regional governments have faced mounting calls to urgently launch search and rescue operations rather than driving off boats and to come up with a coordinated strategy.

"There is some confusion on policy," Vivian Tan, the spokeswoman for UNHCR in Thailand, said. "The numbers are quite overwhelming."

Thailand has called a May 29 regional meeting on the issue, which will be attended by Australia.

Attorney-General George Brandis said \$10.7 million in emergency aid would be provided to Myanmar to deal with ethnic tensions.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-14/malaysia-turns-away-two-vessels-carrying-about-600-migrants/6471168>

16. Hundreds of migrants rescued from boats off Indonesia say they hope to make it to Australia

VIDEO: The Guardian
Source: Reuters
Thursday 14 May 2015 11.03 AEST

Almost 600 migrants from Burma and Bangladesh are being housed in a sports hall in Indonesia's northern Aceh province. They spent more than two months at sea before being rescued off the Indonesian coast. Some hope to eventually get to Australia, though for now officials will move them to a bigger site nearby with better sanitation

Full story at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2015/may/14/migrants-boats-myanmar-bangladesh-indonesia-unhcr-video>

17. Asian migrant crisis grows as 700 asylum seekers rescued off Indonesia

Calls for a summit to discuss the refugee crisis is undermined by Burma which may refuse to attend

The Guardian
Agence France-Presse
Friday 15 May 2015 16.05 AEST

Another 700 Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants were rescued off Indonesia on Friday, police said, as Burma undermined calls for a coordinated response to the human-trafficking crisis by threatening to boycott a planned south-east Asia summit.

Indonesian police said passengers aboard the latest vessel seeking safe harbour in the region recounted how their boat sank off the country's coast after earlier being driven away by Malaysia.

Activists estimate up to 8,000 migrants are at sea in south-east Asia.

But the decision by Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand to turn away stricken boats filled with starving Bangladeshis and ethnic Rohingya from Burma has been met with outrage, including from the US and UN.

"According to initial information we got from them they were pushed away by the Malaysian navy to the border of Indonesian waters," said Sunarya, police chief in the city of Langsa in Aceh province, where the migrants arrived.

The boat was sinking but Indonesian fishermen ferried them to shore, he said. Nearly 1,300 migrants are already sheltering in Aceh after fetching ashore in recent days.

Earlier on Friday, another boat carrying about 300 Rohingya – a persecuted Muslim minority in Burma – left Thailand's waters, a Thai official said, after authorities repaired its engine and provided some food.

The boat's passengers included many children and women who wept as they begged for food and water after arriving near the southern Thai island of Koh Lipe on Thursday.

They told a boatload of journalists of a grim two-month voyage in which 10 passengers had been tossed overboard after dying of starvation or illness.

"We haven't had anything to eat for a week, there is nowhere to sleep... my children are sick," said Sajida, 27, a Rohingya who was travelling with her four young children.

That boat had been trying to reach Malaysia but provincial governor Dejrat Limsiri of the Thai province of Satun told AFP it would now head for Indonesia.

"We gave them ready-to-eat meals. They are now out of Thailand territory... they will try to go to Indonesia as it seems they cannot get to Malaysia," he said Friday.

Human Rights Watch has called the situation a deadly game of "human ping pong".

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on Southeast Asia to "keep their borders and ports open in order to help the vulnerable people who are in need".

He also reminded authorities they were obliged to rescue stricken boats and to respect an international ban on expelling prospective refugees.

The US State Department demanded that Southeast Asian countries "save lives at sea".

Spokesman Jeff Rathke said US ambassadors in the region were coordinating with UN agencies and governments on ways to help.

Many of the migrants are now feared to be stranded at sea after a Thai police crackdown threw busy people-smuggling routes into chaos.

Thailand has announced a regional meeting on the crisis for May 29. But Burma – which refuses citizenship to its Rohingya minority – indicated it would stay away.

"We are unlikely to attend... we do not accept it if they (Thailand) are inviting us just to ease the pressure they are facing," presidential office director Zaw Htay told AFP.

Malaysian Deputy Home Minister Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar on Thursday blamed Burma and Bangladesh for the crisis, chastising Yangon in particular for "the way they treat the Rohingya people".

The Bangladeshis are thought mainly to be economic migrants escaping their country's grinding poverty.

But the Muslim Rohingya flee by the thousands each year to escape state-sanctioned discrimination in Buddhist-majority Burma and recent sectarian violence against them.

There are more than a million Rohingya living in Myanmar's western state of Rakhine, many going back generations, but Burma insists they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/15/asian-migrant-crisis-grows-as-700-more-boat-people-rescued-off-indonesia>

18. MEDIA RELEASE: Abbott's turnback mantra risks Rohingya asylum seekers' lives

Friday May 15, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

The Australian government must provide the urgent humanitarian assistance needed by the up to 8000 Rohingya asylum seekers in boats, at risk, in the Malacca Straits, says the Refugee Action Coalition.

"The Australian government is playing with asylum seekers' lives," said Ian Rintoul, from the Refugee Action Coalition. "It is suddenly obvious that offering 'turnback' advice to Malaysia and Indonesia cannot save lives at sea, but only endanger them.

"The boats must be welcome in Indonesia and Malaysia, and Australia. Australia must immediately lift its ban on accepting UNHCR refugees from Indonesia and offer Rohingya refugees safe passage to Australia. An international rescue effort can guarantee that no lives are lost."

The Australian navy that patrols within hours' steaming time of the Malacca Straits should already be providing search and rescue assistance and ensuring that can get safely to land. Every day and every hour that passes without that assistance puts more asylum seekers lives in danger.

In other emergencies, such as the earthquake in Nepal or the tsunami in Aceh, the Australian government offers aid and material assistance; but when it comes to asylum seekers' lives -- the government is offering but dangerous rhetoric.

"It is obvious that Australia's policy of turning back asylum boats from Indonesia and Sri Lanka has created a dangerous precedent in the region, and turned asylum seekers into political footballs. Asylum seeker boats turned away from Indonesia and Malaysia are also at risk of being turned back by Australia.

"Australia's turnback policy has always been a 'go die somewhere else' policy and that is exactly what's playing out in the Malacca Straits. The rhetoric of blaming people smugglers is a shabby excuse to deny assistance to those in desperate need. The whole world knows the Rohingyans are victims of ethnic cleansing," said Rintoul.

To its credit, Indonesia has offered support to around 600 Rohingya asylum seekers who have landed in Aceh. But to the shame of the Abbott government, foreign aid to Indonesia was cut by 40 per cent, even as the crisis unfolded.

Meanwhile Europe has announced a policy of proportionally sharing asylum seekers arriving from Africa or rescued in the Mediterranean, among participating European countries. "It has never been more obvious that Abbott's slogan of 'stopping the boats' is a costly sham that costs lives. The government could have saved the budget and saved lives by scrapping offshore processing and its monstrous Border Force ministry," said Rintoul.

For more information: contact Ian Rintoul, mob 0417 275 713

19. Indonesia's navy rescues 200 more asylum seekers from waters off Aceh

ABC News Online

By Indonesia correspondent George Roberts, staff

First posted Fri 15 May 2015, 8:08pm

Updated Sat 16 May 2015, 6:49am

The Indonesian navy has rescued another 200 asylum seekers from waters off Aceh.

Indonesian military spokesman Major General Fuad Basya said fishermen spotted the people swimming off the coast of northern Aceh on Friday morning.

A warship was sent to the location and rescued the people, he said.

The incident came after Acehese fishermen rescued more than 700 Rohingyas from a stricken boat and brought them ashore.

Those asylum seekers were receiving medical treatment from authorities in Lanksa, north Aceh.

More than 1,400 asylum seekers have now arrived in Indonesia in the past week and another 1,100 made it to Malaysia.

The Indonesian navy spotted another boat, which it said left Indonesian waters.

Governments should refrain from push backs: US

International immigration authorities from various organisations suspect there could be 8,000 people at sea at the moment, effectively with nowhere to go because no country wants to take them.

On Thursday, Malaysia turned around two boats with 600 migrants, while another boat arrived in Thailand, where authorities said the country was not accepting boatpeople.

Indonesia has sent two more warships to the Aceh area, bringing the total patrolling the waters to three.

A patrol plane was also being used to spot asylum seeker boats.

At this stage, Indonesia's military seems determined to copy Australia's policy of turning asylum seeker boats around and sending them back out into the ocean.

Major General Fuad Basya said the military's job was to protect Indonesian territory and boats entering Indonesian water would be asked to turn around and leave.

The military has conceded they have done this at least once this week.

One boat that was spotted while in trouble was provided with food, fuel, water and some medical equipment before being escorted from Indonesian waters, the military said, adding that the boat was headed to Malaysia.

US secretary of state John Kerry has called Thailand's foreign minister to discuss temporary shelter for Rohingya Muslims adrift at sea, the State Department said on Friday.

State Department spokesman Jeff Rathke said US ambassadors in the region were "intensely engaged" with governments about mounting a rapid humanitarian response.

"We urge the governments of the region to work together quickly, first and foremost, to save the lives of migrants now at sea who are in need of an immediate rescue effort," Mr Rathke said.

"We urge governments in the region to refrain from push backs of new boat arrivals."

'Heartless' response to humanitarian crisis

Phil Robertson, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Asia division, said the refugee situation in South-East Asia was a humanitarian crisis.

"Every boat that's come ashore has been full of people who have been without food and water with major health issues," he told the ABC.

"This is a humanitarian crisis of the first order and these frontline states are being quite heartless in their response."

Mr Robertson said the international community should pressure South-East Asia nations to deal with the number of refugees arriving.

"That means immediate response, not [forcing refugees] into other countries' waters playing essentially human ping pong with some of the most desperate people in the region.

"There has to be concerted international pressure from the UN and from all like-minded countries that this is not an acceptable policy.

"Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia need to pay the price internationally if they want to continue these rights abuses policies that will condemn people to their deaths."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-15/indonesia-rescues-200-asylum-seekers-off-aceh-coast/6474572>

20. More than 100 migrants found on southern Thailand island as thousands remain adrift at sea

ABC News Online / Reuters / AFP
First posted Sat 16 May 2015, 4:27pm
Updated Sat 16 May 2015, 4:31pm

Thailand has found more than 100 migrants on a southern island while thousands remain adrift as boats are pushed back out into south-east Asia's seas by governments who have ignored a UN call for a coordinated rescue.

The crisis arose after smugglers abandoned boats of mainly Rohingya Muslims and Bangladeshi migrants in the Andaman Sea, following a Thai crackdown on human trafficking.

The clampdown has made the preferred land route through the country too risky for criminals preying on the Rohingyas fleeing persecution in Myanmar and Bangladeshis seeking to escape poverty, causing people smugglers to turn to sea routes.

About 2,500 migrants have landed on Indonesia's western tip and the north-west coast of Malaysia over the past week.

Thailand found 106 more on Friday on an island in the southern province of Phang Nga, provincial governor Prayoon Rattanasenee said.

He said it was unclear how they got to the island.

"Most of them are men but there are also women and children," Mr Prayoon said.

"We are trying to determine whether they were victims of human trafficking."

Two boats that crossed the Malacca Strait from the Thailand-Malaysia side have been turned away by the Indonesian navy, and on Friday another was towed out to sea by the Thai navy.

The boat towed out by Thailand was again near Thai waters early on Saturday, after heading first toward Indonesia and then Malaysia on Friday, Thai Lieutenant Commander Veerapong Nakprasit said.

The Thai and Indonesian navies have restocked the boats they pushed back with food and water, and said the migrants did not want to come ashore in their territory.

But those on board have nowhere to go, and are not skilled navigators.

The region's governments have been criticised by the International Organisation for Migration for playing "maritime ping pong" with the migrants and endangering their lives.

The United Nations this week urged governments to fulfil an obligation to rescue those at sea and "keep their borders and ports open ... to help the vulnerable people who are in need".

Myanmar urged to address Rohingya persecution

Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak said his government was seeking a "positive response" from Myanmar to help solve the migrant crisis involving the Rohingyas.

"I hope [Myanmar] will give a positive response as the refugees were due to internal problems that we cannot interfere with, but we want to do something before it gets worse," Mr Najib said.

The United Nations said the deadly pattern of migration by sea across the Bay of Bengal would continue unless Myanmar itself ended discrimination.

Most of Myanmar's 1.1 million Rohingya Muslims are stateless and live in apartheid-like conditions in Rakhine state in the west of the predominantly Buddhist country.

Almost 140,000 were displaced in clashes with ethnic Rakhine Buddhists in 2012.

Myanmar uses the term "Bengalis" for the Rohingya, a term most Rohingya reject because it implies they are immigrants from Bangladesh, despite having lived in Myanmar for generations.

Thailand has called for talks with Myanmar and Malaysia to resolve the crisis.

Myanmar had not received any invitation to talks and would not attend if the word Rohingya was used, senior official Zaw Htay said.

"We haven't received any formal invitation from Thailand officially yet," he said.

"And another thing, if they use the term Rohingya we won't take part in it since we don't recognise this term. The Myanmar government has been protesting against the use of it all along."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-16/thailand-finds-over-100-migrants-on-island2c-many-more-still-a/6475266>