



UN Refugee Bracing for Somalia Exodus

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/02/12/un-refugee-agency-bracing-somalia-exodus.html>

The United Nations (UN) Refugee agency said they are bracing for a mass flight to neighboring of civilians seeking to escape violence in Somalia. A spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Melissa Fleming, said the agency is stepping up preparations in Kenya and other East African countries. She said UNHCR has received information from the local aid groups that 24 people have been

killed and 40 injured by fighting in Somalia's capital. She told reporters in Geneva that residents have been streaming out of Mogashidu after rumors that pro-government forces are planning a major offensive against rebels. More than 250.000 people have left the city since last May.

(Ni Putu Anggraeni)

Malaysia Plans IDs for Refugees to Prevent Arrest

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/02/01/malaysia-plans-ids-refugees-prevent-arrest.html>

Malaysia planned to issue identification cards to refugees who are recognized by the United Nations. This identification card allow them to stay in the country temporarily and avoid arrest as illegal immigrants.

Malaysia which has declined to join the UN Convention on Refugees

for fear of attracting a flood of migrants, previously has arrested refugees frequently as illegal aliens, mostly from Myanmar. Those refugees often have spent months in overcrowded detention center and faced caning and deportation. The Plans announced reflect a softening of

Malaysia's position toward the refugees, although it continues to refuse them official recognition.

Home Ministry Secretary General, Mahmood Adam said the government would work with the UN Refugee Agency to issue the cards so the Immigration Enforcement Personel would recognize and spare UN designated refugees. He said as long as they are recognized as refugees by the UN, they can stay there temporarily. They cannot work there, but they can do odd jobs. He could not give an exact timeline but he said the initiative was in the final stage.

According to the UN Agency, about 75.600 refugees and asylum seekers were in Malaysia as of November. Most fled from persecution in Myanmar. Yante Ismail, a spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugee, welcomed the development and further discussion to form a documentation system. She said proper documentation for refugees is essential for their protection. All refugees in Malaysia are waiting to be resettled to a third country that officially accepts refugees, which grants them legal status and the right to work.

(Ni Putu Anggraeni)

Government to Hand Over More Houses for Former East Timor Refugees

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/01/30/govt-hand-over-more-houses-former-east-timor-refugees.html>

Indonesia Social Affairs Minister, Salim Segaf Al-Jufri, will officially hand over an additional 1.000 houses for former East Timor refugees in Kupang and Belu regencies in the East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). The Head of Nusa Tenggara Social Agency said the Minister and Military Chief General, Djoko Santoso were expected to arrive in the province and to leave for Atambua, Belu, for the ceremony. The houses were constructed through a cooperation

between the Ministry and the military last year. Previously the Government had handed over a total of 7.000 houses for the former refugees. Ten thousands people are reportedly still living in emergency barracks, and thousands of families still have no access to Government assistance after the independence of East Timor in the 1999 referendum.

(Ni Putu Anggraeni)

Immigrants Threaten Suicide, Refuse Relocation

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/02/09/immigrants-threaten-suicide-refuse-relocation.html>

Fifty five Illegal Immigrants from Afghanistan and Egypt are being placed in custody on Sabu Island, Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT). The illegal immigrants were saved by local fishermen when their boat was hit by a storm. They are threatening to commit suicide if the police continue to force them to move to Kupang. Sabu Raijua Regent, Thobias Uly said the illegal immigrants, most of them were men, attempted suicide by banging their heads on the wall, hitting their heads with hard object and leaping in front of passing vehicles. He said the foreign citizens refused to leave Sabu Island, but when they asked what their reasons were, no one could give an answer. They only said they did not want to be moved from Sabu Islam to another place, including Kupang. They were stranded at the Menia Beach in West Sabu district in Sabu Raijua rejeny, after their boat was hit by huge waves. They had intended to seek refugee in Australia. During their stay on Sabu Island, they were treated well. Thobias

said the international Organization for Migration is also dealing with the issue.

NTT Police spokesman, Comander Okto G. Riwu said the illegal immigration had refused to be relocated and demanded their status to be recognized as international refugees. He said police only wish to uphold the law because the immigrants had entered Indonesia illegally. They will be processed according to regulations because they did not have the official documents. He added the NTT Police would be coordinated with the Egyptian and Afghanistan embassies in order to immediately relocate the 55 immigrants.

Last year, the authorities were able to foil an attempt to smuggle around 500 immigrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and other countries to Australia through NTT. Most of the human smuggling cases were foiled when the boats carrying the refugees faced accidents.

(Ni Putu Anggraeni)

Melkadida is the second camp

UNHCR Starts Remove Somali Refugees to New Camp in Ethiopia

<http://www.unhcr.org/4b7ac4399.html>

in south-east Ethiopia and the fifth camp in Ethiopia accommodating Somali refugees. The first one in the south-east, Bokolmanyo, which opened in April last year to accommodate 20,000 refugees, has reached full capacity. The land at Melkadida on which the new camp was constructed has been provided by the local authorities. It can accommodate up to 20,000 refugees. UNHCR and its partners are expanding basic infrastructure, including water and sanitation services, a health centre, basic communal facilities and a children's centre. Establishment of schools and other facilities and services is planned. After arriving at Melkadida, refugees spend three days in a reception area then moved to their allocated plots of land. Tents have been erected until permanent shelters are in place. Refugees are provided with food as well as tarpaulins, blankets, kitchen sets, jerry cans and mosquito nets. The plan is to relocate 500 refugees a week from the transit centre to the new camp.

The UN Refugee agency has begun relocating Somali Refugees from a transit centre in Eastern Ethiopia to a new camp, around 65 km

away. The 1st convoy which consist of 11 buses and 2 trucks carrying their luggage, transported 247 Somali refugees from Dolo Ado to the camp at Melkadida. The refugees had fled worsening security and limited access to humanitarian aid in central and southern Somalia over the past weeks. They are part of a group of 7,000 Somalis who have recently been recognized as refugees by the Ethiopian government with UNHCR expert support.

The Somali Region of Ethiopia already hosts more than 60,000 Somali refugees in four camps, Au-Barre, Bokolmanyo, Kebribeyah and Sheder. Somalis are arriving in Ethiopia at an average of 200 people per day and UNHCR is already planning for further camps near Melkadida.

At the peak of the Somali refugee crisis in the early 1990s, the region hosted 628,000 refugees in eight camps. The overwhelming majority of those refugees returned to their homes between 1997 and 2005 and all but one camp had been closed. Three new camps had to be opened in Ethiopia in 2007, 2008 and 2009 due to renewed conflict across the

border. The context behind this is a situation in Mogadishu in which some 13,600 people have been forced from their homes over the past two weeks alone as a result of clashes between government troops and armed opposition groups. At least 50 people were reportedly killed and more than 100 injured since the conflict intensified.

Meanwhile, UNHCR is carrying out a distribution of emergency

relief items, including plastic sheets, blankets, sleeping mats, kitchen sets, jerry cans and sanitation and hygiene items to 18,000 displaced people in villages around Dhussammarebb in central Somalia, where more than 28,000 people were displaced in January following renewed clashes between the Alu Sunna Wal Jamma and Al-Shabaab militias earlier this year.

(Ni Putu Anggraeni)

Sri Lankan Immigrants Leave for Australia and Philippines

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/01/19/sri-lankan-immigrants-leave-australia-philippines.html>

Riau Islands Justice and Human Rights in Riau Island office will release 16 Sri Lankan immigrants who will leave for Australia and the Philippines. The Head of office, I Gede Widiarta said the Asylum seekers would stop in Jakarta before being transferred to the two countries upon request by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Widiarta said to follow the verification by the IOM and the UNHCR, six will leave for Australia and the rest to the Philippines. While the other Sri Lankan

immigrants were resettled in several countries, such as Australia, Canada and Thailand.

The immigrants were part of 78 Sri Lankan boat people who were intercepted by Australian customs and excise officers while on patrol near Christmas Island last year. They were sent to the Riau Island's immigration detention center in Tanjung Pinang upon request of Australia. There are 124 asylum seekers from foreign countries staying in the Tanjung Pinang detention center to wait for the resettlement.

(Ni Putu Anggraeni)

15 Rescued Sri Lankan Refugees Leave Indonesia

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/12/19/15-rescued-sri-lankan-refugees-leave-indonesia.html>

Fifteen Sri Lankan Tamil refugees left Indonesia for Canada and Australia only two months after they were rescued at sea by an Australian customs vessel. They were among 78 Tamils who for a month refused to leave the ship that rescued them. They finally disembarked after promises they would be rapidly resettled. Refugees in Indonesia typically wait for years before being resettled. The 78 were trying to reach Australia when their wooden boat's engine broke down in international waters near Indonesia. They left the Indonesian immigration detention center in Pangkal Pinang on a small island just off of Sumatra, with 13 of them Indonesia resettle in Canada

and two in Australia said Foreign Ministry spokesman, Sujatmiko. Australian Immigration Ministry spokesman Reese Davies declined to comment. They are the first to find permanent homes among the 78 Tamils whose asylum claims have all been accepted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Indonesia, which is not a signatory to the UN Convention on Refugees, has become a major transit point for an increasing number of asylum seekers from war-ridden countries like Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Iraq who slip through on their way to Australia.

(Ni Putu Anggraeni)

Fragile Calm Holds in Darfur After Years of Death

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/02/world/africa/02darfur.html>

Darfur, Sudan's enormous western region that has become virtually synonymous with conflict, seems to be stuck between war and peace. There is still violence, a lot of it, with five Rwandan peacekeepers recently killed and aid workers kidnapped and routinely carjacked. Heavily

armed bandits - possibly castoffs from the earlier days of more organized warfare - have become ubiquitous. Partly because of that, the flow of people out of the camps is just a trickle compared with the 2.7 million still stuck in them, afraid to go home.

The changes across Darfur would have been hard to imagine just a few years ago. The rebel groups Janjaweed that started the war in Darfur in 2003, catalyzing a conflict that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, almost seem to have gone into hibernation. On this planting season, for the first time since 2003, United Nations officials say that tens of thousands of farmers who had been seeking refuge in squalid displaced persons camps returned to their villages to plant crops, a journey many Darfurians would have considered suicide until recently.

Daniel Augstburger, the director of the African Union-United Nations humanitarian liaison office in Darfur said people need to update their perception of Darfur. There is no more Janjaweed riding around, burning down villages and threatening villagers. At El Fasher airport which used to be crawling with pilots, soldiers, national security agents and dubious armed men, the fighter jets sit idle on the runway, cockpits covered in canvas. Occasionally they fly sorties, the camouflage-painted planes cutting across an impossibly bright sky. However there have been no major bombing campaigns for months, peacekeeping officials said. Lt. Gen. Patrick Nyamvumba, the Rwandan commander of the 20,000 peacekeepers in Darfur, said 'Frozen'

is a good word for the situation in Darfur recently. It is very calm at the moment, but it remains unpredictable.

The rebel groups have been quiet in the past year, hobbled by endless fragmentation and no clear political agenda. At the same time, the Sudanese government seems encouraged by the Obama administration's talk of engaging with the nation, rather than isolating it, and United Nations officials say there is little evidence the government is sponsoring ethnic violence here, as it was accused of doing not so long ago.

Even some of the most outspoken activists on Darfur, who helped keep this conflict on the world's front pages for the past five years, drawing more attention to Darfur than just about any other African war in recent memory, do not automatically recoil anymore at statements like, "The war is over." That was essentially what the former peacekeeping commander said in August, provoking a protracted controversy. Eric Reeves, a Professor at Smith College and one of the leading academic voices on Darfur, said there is no doubt that violence has diminished significantly in the past two or three years, and many, including himself, have been slow to recognize how significant this reduction has been.

But, he added civilians were still being attacked and the anger, frustration and despair simply cannot be overstated.

Few of the cataclysmic predictions of the past few years have come true - not the big Sudanese government offensives that many feared would take place in 2006 and 2007, or the expected attacks by thousands of Janjaweed against refugee camps. Even the widespread death and disease that United Nations officials and many aid workers worried would be the consequence of the Sudanese government's expulsion of 13 foreign aid organizations last year were largely averted. The hybrid African Union-United Nations peacekeeping mission, the most expensive in the world at \$1.6 billion per year, which took years of negotiation to put in place, is also going much better than expected, the peacekeepers say.

In the camps, the transient life of the refugee is becoming permanent. Most people hate living there. The crowded huts, the waiting for food handouts, the idleness are steadily taking their toll. Abbas Abdallah Mohamed, a farmer who fled his village four years ago, said that he is uncomfortable and depressed, but like many others, he was not ready to venture home. Some camp dwellers have begun taking

jobs in nearby towns making bricks the biblical way, out of mud and straw, building solid homes for others while they themselves live in temporary shelters often constructed from twigs and plastic bags. Mohamed B. Yonis, a top United Nations official in Darfur, said there is possibility that the refugees could be on the camps forever.

The focus in Sudan seems to be steadily shifting to the south. Rebels in southern Sudan fought a separatist war for decades, and the region is scheduled to vote on its independence next year. But as the south edges toward nationhood, ethnic violence is building, with more than 2,000 people killed in 2009, many more than in Darfur, according to United Nations officials. The root cause of both rebellions, in the south and in Darfur, is marginalization. Sudan has a history of concentrating power and wealth in the center of the country, at the expense of the periphery. Until this issue being addressed, analysts say, Darfur will most likely remain tense, even if that tension is not expressed in mass killings or scorched villages. However one hope is that camp elders, religious figures and women's leaders are being given prominent roles in peace talks for the first time.

(Jeska Daslita)

Refugees Are Not Bargaining Chips Sign in to Recommend

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/02/opinion/02iht-edfrelick.html>

Some countries in the Asia Pacific Region have been considered for violating the fundamental refugees' rights. In October 2009, Australia and Indonesia stopped boats carrying Sri Lankans. Neither country would allow the Sri Lankans to disembark even though they came from a country experiencing massive violence and displacement. Almost three months later, one of the boats, holding more than 250 Sri Lankans, remains anchored in the West Java port of Merak.

A small group of Uighur men, women and children fleeing the aftermath of the worst ethnic violence in decades in China sought asylum in Cambodia. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees issued "persons of concern" letters on their behalf and moved them into a facility it managed jointly with the Cambodian government. However, Cambodia forcibly returned 20 Uighurs on December 19, despite the protests of the U.N. agency, the diplomatic corps and human rights groups. They have not been heard from since.

Thai soldiers with truncheons and shields herded more than 4,000

Hmong asylum seekers onto buses back to Laos from the Huay Nam Khao camp in Petchabun Province, Thailand, where they have lived since 2005. For four years, the Thai Army detained the Hmong in the closed camp, never allowing the U.N. refugee agency to interview them or assess their claims to refugee status. The Thai Army's own screening process, based on criteria never made public, found that hundreds of the Hmong had legitimate protection concerns, but Thailand never provided any additional protections. Thai government maintained that the Hmong were "economic migrants" but refused any fair determination process to assess that claim.

When it came, the forced repatriation was conducted in the face of loud international condemnation, from the refugee agency, top levels of the U.S. State Department, and the president of the European Union. A group of 158 Hmong who not only had been recognized as refugees by the U.N. refugee agency but also had been offered resettlement by Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and the United States were also deported. They had been detained separately

in abysmal conditions for three years at Nong Khai immigration detention center.

The willingness to disobey international refugee law and to ignore the entreaties of refugees not to be sent back to their home countries has become the mark of sociable bilateral relations between Asian states. Thailand sends back Hmong refugees - a group with a history of persecution at the hands of the Lao government dating back to the 1960s - citing a secret bilateral agreement and the Lao government's assurances of their safe treatment. Cambodia forcibly repatriates Uighurs just as the Chinese vice president, Xi Jinping, arrives on a visit to Phnom Penh to announce a \$1.2 billion aid package to Cambodia.

Governments in the region this month have lied outright to the U.N. refugee agency about their intentions to return "people of concern" to their home countries, blocked the agency from interviewing asylum seekers to assess their claims, and simply ignored the agency's protests. The marginalization of the U.N. agency goes hand in hand with rapid erosion of the bedrock principle of international refugee law, non-refoulement, the prohibition on the forcible return of refugees to places where they would be likely to face persecution.

This latest strain of refugee mis-

treatment has its antecedents, in part, because Asia, unlike Africa, the Americas and Europe, has no legal regional framework for refugee protection. Few Asian governments have even signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, ratified by 147 countries, which sets the global standard for the treatment of refugees. The African refugee convention has a provision that should be particularly instructive for Asian governments: "The grant of asylum to refugees is a peaceful and humanitarian act and shall not be regarded as an unfriendly act by any Member State."

The spate of refugee returns has the urgency of an impending epidemic that needs to be contained. However the focus of immediate concern now shifts to the home countries to which these unfortunate people have been returned. China and Laos need to provide the United Nations and other relevant agencies immediate and continuous access to the returnees in an atmosphere of complete openness and accountability. In the new decade, Asian governments should commit themselves not only to the non-refoulement principle, but also to the idea that granting asylum is a humanitarian act that should be entirely divorced from political relations between states.

(Jeska Daslita)

Invisible among the Dispossessed: Internally Displaced Persons

http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=8ed5b18a51eaf015a3c758faff4b0b9b

After the devastating earthquake that killed more than 200,000 people in Haiti, the island nation has been more or less adopted by the world community. While the hundreds of thousands who subsist on hand outs and live in tents cannot depend on their own government, they can at least expect the world to continue to provide aid, and Haiti itself is receiving donations and funds from all over the world. Equally important, it has world sympathy and attention.

For among the world's dispossessed there's a sub-group of people rarely addressed by the global community, but whose numbers are growing by leaps and bounds: the internally displaced Persons. No legal definition exists for them. While a refugee who fits the strict definition given by the Geneva Convention is, at least in principle, provided some legal protection, such as the right to food and shelter and the freedom to practice his religion, an internally displaced person is virtually invisible.

A United Nations report "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement" defines Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) as "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border."

It is the "natural or human-made disasters" part of the UN definition - which itself is not legally binding - that makes the number difficult to quantify and monitor. Do the 100 million or roaming Chinese within the country because of industrial pollution devastated their agricultural land or displacement by a government building project count as refugees? And how are about the number of Burmese displaced by Hurricane Nagis?

Internally Displaced Persons often suffer more than refugees, being forced to flee, they fail to cross an international border and thereby legally qualify as refugees. Instead of receiving international protection and capturing media coverage, IDPs remain invisible and are often subjected to abuse within their own country. When their government is ignoring or fails to protect them, and, as in the case of Myanmar, refuses foreign aid and restricts the international media, very little protection for IDPs can be had.

The internally displaced can be found in more than two dozen countries around the world. There are 2 million of them in Colombia, half a million in the Ivory Coast, more than 3 million in Pakistan, just to name a few countries. And the numbers add up. According to the UNCHR 2009 annual report there are 42 million uprooted people in the world. The total includes 16 million refugees and asylum seekers and 26 million uprooted people within their own countries. However, some organizations estimate that the actual number of IDP is easily twice the number of internationally recognized refugees, if not triple that amount. The figure can fluctuate due to, for example, the sudden outbreak civil war or a natural disaster such as an erupting volcano, tsunami or earthquake.?

Distributions of food and medicine vary from place to place, and IDP protection depends on where they find themselves and which country they are in. Haiti is but a quick hurdle from the United States. Food and supplies and media coverage came relatively quickly - if chaotically - for earthquake victims. After five years of civil war in Darfur, hundreds of villages have been destroyed, 400,000 have died, and 2.2 million are displaced and facing starvation and ongoing violence. It is a humanitarian crisis in which the international response is shockingly slow and ineffectual, and world attention is sporadic.

Refugees and IDP are essentially the same. Both groups are coerced or compelled to flee in fear for their lives and security, but those who crossed internationally recognized state borders are entitled to systematic protection and assistance under existing international treaties, while those who don't are entitled to little and remain cursed with invisibility.

(Jeska Daslita)