The plight of Rohingya refugees, including mass graves in Thailand

European Parliament resolution of 21 May 2015 on the plight of Rohingya refugees, including the mass graves in Thailand (2015/2711(RSP))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to its previous resolutions on Burma/Myanmar and the Rohingya, in particular those of 20 April 2012¹, 13 September 2012², 22 November 2012³ and 13 June 2013⁴, and to its resolution of 23 May 2013 on reinstatement of Myanmar/Burma’s access to generalised tariff preferences⁵,

– having regard to its resolution of 5 February 2009 on the situation of Burmese refugees in Thailand⁶,

– having regard to the statement by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) of 6 May 2015 concerning Rohingya mass graves in Thailand,

– having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948,

– having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966,

– having regard to the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto,

– having regard to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Human Rights Declaration, notably paragraphs 13, 15, 16 and 18 thereof,

– having regard to the UNHCR appeal of 15 May 2015 to regional governments to conduct search-and-rescue operations, in which it warned of ‘a potential humanitarian disaster’,

– having regard to Rules 135(5) and 123(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

¹ OJ C 258 E, 7.9.2013, p. 79.
⁵ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0228.
A. whereas in an escalating region-wide crisis, it is estimated that thousands of Rohingya and other refugees are still on boats in the Andaman Sea and the Strait of Malacca, some abandoned by their traffickers with little food or water, and are being pushed back into the sea when their boats enter territorial waters;

B. whereas on 1 and 4 May 2015 the military police discovered the bodies of at least 30 ethnic Rohingya Muslims in a suspected human trafficking camp in the Sadao district of Songkhla Province, close to the Thai-Malaysian border; whereas another camp with at least five other graves was found some days later;

C. whereas Rohingyas continue to suffer from persecution and discrimination and to be arbitrarily deprived of their citizenship in Burma/Myanmar, and therefore remain stateless; whereas on 1 April 2015 the Burmese Government rescinded their temporary identity cards, stripping them of voting rights; whereas impunity continues to prevail in cases of crimes and atrocities against them;

D. whereas the Rohingya have been leaving Burma/Myanmar in large numbers since an outbreak of violence in 2012 left neighbourhoods razed and claimed hundreds of lives; whereas many of those who escaped fell into the hands of trafficking gangs that operate within the Bay of Bengal;

E. whereas according to the UNHCR periodic report of 8 May 2015, some 25 000 Rohingyas and Bangladeshis boarded smugglers’ boats between January and March 2015; whereas this is almost double the number of people who did so over the same period in 2014;

F. whereas several thousand Rohingyas have fled by sea to escape persecution, and whereas hundreds have lost their lives in sinking boats or by being pushed back into the sea;

G. whereas since the crackdown the human traffickers have turned to sea routes; whereas there are an increasing number of cases of migrants being abandoned at sea by their traffickers;

H. whereas thousands of Rohingya people and other migrants continue to be smuggled through Thailand and from other countries in the region by human traffickers, in some cases including corrupt local Thai authorities, and to be held captive in inhuman conditions in jungle camps in southern Thailand, where they are tortured, starved and beaten to death by their captors to extort ransoms from their families and relatives, or sold into human slavery;

I. whereas the UNHCR has called for a joint response in the wake of the Rohingya mass graves in Thailand, urging countries in the region to strengthen cooperation on counter-smuggling and counter-trafficking measures while ensuring the protection of victims;

J. whereas the Rohingya issue was not discussed during the recent 26th ASEAN Summit, held from 26 to 28 April 2015 in Malaysia;

K. whereas from 2010 to 2015 the Commission’s Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) provided some EUR 57.3 million in humanitarian aid to vulnerable people in Rakhine State; whereas in 2015 ECHO is funding projects throughout Rakhine State to address some of the most urgent needs among the Rohingya in the northern townships, including food and nutrition, basic health services and the supply of other basic household items, and to support the population displaced since 2012;
L. whereas ECHO has allocated EUR 325 000 to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) since 2013 to provide food, basic household items, health care and protection to some 3 000 Rohingya men, women and children detained in Thailand;

1. Expresses its deepest concern over the plight of Rohingya refugees and the humanitarian crisis taking place at the moment on the high seas and in the territorial waters between Myanmar, Bangladesh, Thailand and Indonesia, and is shocked by the findings following the recent exhumation of dozens of bodies from mass gravesites near human trafficking camps in southern Thailand; extends its condolences to the families of the victims;

2. Calls on the Thai authorities to hold immediate, full and credible criminal investigations into the mass graves of Rohingya Muslims and, if necessary with UN assistance, to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice;

3. Welcomes the acknowledgement by the Government of Thailand of the problem of human trafficking in Thailand and the region, and of the complicity of certain corrupt authorities in smuggling humans; calls on the Government of Thailand and its officials to end any complicity with the criminal gangs trafficking Rohingya people and other migrants in Thailand;

4. Calls on all countries in the region to strengthen cooperation on counter-smuggling and counter-trafficking measures while ensuring the protection of victims; underlines the important role ASEAN can play in this regard; encourages the governments of states in the region to participate in the upcoming regional meeting on the migrant situation, which will be hosted by Thailand on 29 May 2015 in Bangkok; welcomes the drafting of the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP), which should be endorsed by ASEAN leaders in the course of 2015;

5. Calls on all countries in the region to sign and ratify the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees and to provide Rohingya asylum seekers at least with temporary protection, while supporting the Burmese Government in finding long-term, equitable solutions to the underlying causes;

6. Further calls on the Government of Burma/Myanmar to change its policy and take all necessary measures to end persecution of, and discrimination against, the Rohingya minority; reiterates its earlier calls for the amendment or repeal of the 1982 Citizenship Law in order to give Rohingyas equal access to Burmese citizenship;

7. Welcomes the long overdue statement of 18 May 2015 by the spokesperson for Aung San Suu Kyi’s opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), that the Government of Burma/Myanmar should grant citizenship to the Rohingya minority;

8. Urges the leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand to make saving the lives of migrants and refugees stranded on vessels in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea a top priority, and welcomes the declaration by Malaysia and Indonesia of 20 May 2015 that they will give temporary sanctuary to migrants found at sea;

9. Welcomes the aid provided by the European Union and international organisations such as the UNHCR to the Rohingya in Myanmar/Burma and Thailand, and the EU humanitarian assistance provided to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Arakan/Rakhine State, to undocumented Rohingya and vulnerable host populations in Bangladesh and to Rohingya
and Bangladeshi migrants currently being held in immigration detention centres (men) or social welfare centres (women and children) in Thailand;

10. Calls on the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to address this issue at the highest possible political level in her contacts with Thailand and Burma/Myanmar and with other ASEAN member countries;

11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Government and Parliament of Burma/Myanmar, the Government and Parliament of Thailand, the Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, the UN Special Representative for Human Rights in Myanmar, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Human Rights Council and the governments and parliaments of other states in the region.