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Situation of Burmese refugees in Thailand

European Parliament resolution of 5 February 2009 on the situation of Burmese refugees in Thailand

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and the 1967 Protocol thereto,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on Burma,
 - having regard to Rule 115(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas it has been reported that around 1 000 Rohingya boat people from Burma were intercepted by the navy in Thai territorial waters between 18 and 30 December 2008 and were subsequently towed into international waters without navigational equipment or sufficient food and water; whereas many of those boat people are missing and feared drowned while some of them were rescued by Indonesian or Indian coastguards,
- B. whereas the Rohingya people, a mainly Muslim ethnic community in western Burma, are subjected to systematic, persistent and widespread human rights violations by the ruling military regime, including refusing them the status of citizenship, imposing severe restrictions on their freedom of movement, and subjecting them to arbitrary arrest,
- C. whereas in recent years thousands of Burmese have fled from their home country because of the repression and wide-spread hunger and risked their lives to arrive in Thailand and other south-east Asian countries; whereas Thailand is increasingly becoming a transit destination for Burmese refugees,
- D. whereas the Thai authorities have denied those accusations and Prime Thai Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva has promised a full investigation,
- E. whereas the United Nations Refugee Agency has voiced its concern about the reports of mistreatment of the Burmese refugees and has gained access to some of the 126 Rohingya people who are still being held in custody by the Thai authorities,
- F. whereas the Thai authorities claim that migrants caught in Thai waters were illegal economic migrants,
1. Deplores reports of inhumane treatment inflicted on the Rohingya refugees and urges the Government of Thailand, as a respected member of the international community well-known for its hospitality towards refugees, to take all necessary measures to ensure that the lives of Rohingya people are not at risk and that they are treated in accordance with humanitarian standards;
 2. Strongly condemns the continuous persecution of the Rohingya people by the Burmese Government, which holds prime responsibility for the plight of the refugees; demands the restoration of the Burmese citizenship of the Rohingya people, the immediate lifting of all restrictions on their freedom of movement and their right to be educated and marry, the

cessation of religious persecution and the destruction of mosques and other places of worship, and an end to all human rights violations across the country as well as deliberate impoverishment, arbitrary taxation and land confiscation;

3. Appeals to the Thai Government not to return the Rohingya refugees and asylum seekers, including the boat people, to Burma, where their lives will be in danger or where they may be subject to torture;
4. Welcomes the statement by Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva that the allegations of mistreatment of Rohingya asylum seekers by the military will be investigated, and requests that a thorough and impartial inquiry be carried out, with full transparency in order to establish the facts and take appropriate action against those responsible for mistreatment of Burmese refugees;
5. Welcomes the Thai Government's cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and calls for immediate and full access to all the detained Rohingya boat people in order to define the level of their need for protection; calls, at the same time, on the Thai Government to sign the Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol thereto;
6. Stresses that the phenomenon of boat people, which affects Thailand and other countries, is essentially a regional one; views positively the efforts of the Thai Government to increase cooperation among regional neighbours to address concerns about the Rohingya people; welcomes, in this respect, the meeting held on 23 January 2009 by the Thai Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Virasakdi Futrakul, with the Ambassadors of India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Burma; and appeals to the members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and, in particular, its Thai chair and relevant international organisations, to work on a permanent solution to this long-standing problem;
7. Calls on the Member States to strengthen the EU Common Position, which is due for renewal in April 2009, in order to address the appalling discrimination against the Rohingya people;
8. Considers that sending a Parliament delegation to Burma is of major importance in the present human rights situation, which continues to show no signs of improvement, and believes that international pressure on the regime should be reinforced;
9. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments of the Member States, the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand, the Government of Burma, the Secretary-General of the Association of South East Asian Nations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Secretary-General of the United Nations.