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STATEMENT: Comprehensive and coordinated regional action urgently needed to address the biggest escalation of irregular maritime movement by Rohingya since the 2015 Andaman Sea Crisis

Dhaka, 15 December 2023 – Protecting Refugees in Asia (PRiA) project partners call for a comprehensive and coordinated regional response to address the recent escalation of irregular maritime movement by Rohingya to Indonesia.

Over 2,000 Rohingya have arrived in Indonesia by boat since the beginning of October 2023 and more are expected to arrive in the coming weeks and months. Recent arrivals – 75% of whom are women and children – are in urgent need of shelter, nutrition and medical assistance. Local NGOs and international organisations have been working in earnest to mobilise and deliver these services.

Driven to undertake dangerous sea journeys due to a deterioration of conditions in Myanmar and in refugee camps in Bangladesh, the precipitous rise of Rohingya arriving in Indonesia has exceeded Indonesia's sheltering capacity. In addition, there has been increasing pushback from local authorities and community members, as well as a spike in xenophobic and racial backlash on social media.

However, while the majority of refugees are attempting to land in Aceh, Indonesia, it is crucial to recognise that Rohingya maritime movements represent a regional crisis and it is not an issue that Indonesia should face alone.

To address this regional crisis, PRiA project partners call upon governments across the region including Bangladesh, Malaysia and Thailand – as well as strategic states with regional interests such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States – to work collectively in their efforts to holistically address this issue. They must urgently convene to support the implementation of search and rescue operations, guarantee safe disembarkation, create protection sensitive reception arrangements and provide safe and dignified shelter.

We also call upon the Bali Process, as the only regional institution with a mandate to address irregular migration in the region, to take immediate action to ensure protection for Rohingya refugees at sea. Under the leadership of its Indonesia and Australia co-chairs, the Bali Process must step up its efforts and play a leading role in coordinating a regional response.

The Consultation Mechanism, which was reactivated in February this year, must become more than just a forum for discussion, but rather a mechanism for action. Member States should be mobilised to more fairly distribute responsibility for rescuing, disembarking, and receiving Rohingya refugees and ensuring their access to protection.

As a complement to renewed commitment to regional coordination, PRiA project partners also urge the international community to recommit to provide sustainable solutions for the Rohingya. The Global Refugee Forum – being held this week in Geneva, Switzerland – is a key opportunity to demonstrate leadership and cooperation at the global level to support the Rohingya. To prevent their plight from becoming another forgotten crisis, it is imperative that the international community supports a comprehensive response to protect Rohingya refugees.



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Background:

The Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP) is a joint initiative of the Danish Refugee Council, the International Rescue Committee and the Norwegian Refugee Council, which aims to contribute to the development of comprehensive solutions for displaced persons across the Afghan and Myanmar displacement axes.

The “Protecting Refugees in Asia” (PRiA) project is a joint project of Adventist Development & Relief Agency (ADRA), the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), HOST International Malaysia, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Indonesia, and the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC). Through support from the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the project addresses the protection risks and needs of refugees in Asia with a particular focus on India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. It combines evidence-based research with programmatic and advocacy expertise to allow project partners, through their comparative advantages, to explore and advocate through new paths to support refugees and the communities hosting them.

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