

UNHCR calls for urgent disembarkation of Rohingya refugees in Bireuen, Aceh waters

JAKARTA, 28 December 2021 - UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, calls for the immediate, life-saving disembarkation of a group of Rohingya refugees in distress at sea off the coast of Bireuen, Aceh, Indonesia. The boat was first sighted in waters off Bireuen on 26 December.

Based on photos and reports from local fishermen, the passengers on the packed, unseaworthy boat are overwhelmingly women and children. The boat, which reportedly is leaking and has a damaged engine, is floating in the open seas in the middle of harsh weather and may be at risk of capsizing.

UNHCR is deeply concerned for the safety and lives of those onboard. To prevent needless loss of life, we strongly urge the Indonesian Government to allow safe disembarkation immediately.

The 2016 Presidential Regulation number 125 on refugee protection includes provisions for the Government of Indonesia to rescue refugees on boats in distress near Indonesia and to help them disembark. These provisions were implemented previously in 2018, 2020 and most recently in June 2021, when 81 Rohingya refugees were rescued off the coast of East Aceh.

For many years, Indonesia has set an example for other countries in the region in providing refugee protection. UNHCR hopes to see the same humanitarian spirit again today in Aceh. Rohingya have faced violence, persecution and forced displacement for decades. All those seeking international protection must be allowed safe harbour and granted access to asylum procedures and humanitarian aid.

UNHCR staff are currently on the ground, working closely in coordination with the local authorities as we stand ready to assist the government and the local community to provide immediate life-saving assistance for the group. We are also coordinating with humanitarian partners in preparation for a comprehensive response, which includes a quarantine process that is in line with international standards and public health protocols.

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