Statement endorsed by 120 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) attending the Asia Pacific CSO Forum on Sustainable Development on the issue of the trafficked Rohingya people

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND!
Take action now! Save the lives of the trafficked victims at sea!

Prosecute the traffickers!

This is the call of representatives from 120 grassroots people’s organizations, civil society groups and all human rights advocates and supporters attending the 2015 Asia Pacific CSO Forum on Sustainable Development in Bangkok, Thailand on 17-18 May 2015 as we express our deep and collective concern over the 6,000 to 8,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshi people currently stranded along the Malacca Strait as the Thai, Malaysian, Indonesian and Philippine governments continue to disallow them from disembarking safely on their shores.

This humanitarian crisis needs to be immediately and collectively resolved by all governments before more innocent lives are lost. It will be such a shame to see them, stakeholders to the sustainable development goals that all States are crafting and finalizing now, die because we failed to take proactive measures to save them and resolve the situation.

To simply call them as boatpeople is degrading and demeaning. They are not criminals or illegals. They are victims of human trafficking. The people who left them at sea, who capitalized on their poverty or crisis situation are the perpetrators who should be arrested and tried in the court of law.

These people have been adrift for days and weeks now. They are exhausted. They are desperate. They will turn on each other – as had happened already – and make the situation worse. Do not make them resent each other more, be less tolerant and hateful of each other.

While the crisis is a very layered and complex regional problem, the most humane temporary solution is to allow the trafficked victims onshore, attend to their immediate medical and physical needs while a long-term and lasting solution is to be worked out.

Thus, we call:

1) For all the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines and all in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to show leadership and humanity by immediately providing humanitarian aid to all men, women and children found stranded on boats by accepting them on land, giving them temporary shelter and refuge, and providing them with food, water, sanitary facilities and medical attention;

2) Treat all of them as victims of trafficking. They are more than just Rohingyas or Bangladeshis. They are people whose human rights have been violated, their dignity taken away, their humanity stripped off them;

3) For all the governments in the ASEAN and especially the Bangladeshi government to take swift and decisive action to crackdown and arrest all traffickers, and ensure that no more innocent lives especially in Bangladesh will be imperiled by any trafficker or trafficking ring;

4) For all related country governments to attend the upcoming summit to identify an action plan to address this humanitarian crisis, including ensuring the restoration of dignity and temporary source of livelihood for the trafficked victims; and
5) For all ODA (Official Development Aid) donor country governments to prioritize support to enable immediate humanitarian response and take necessary measures to the relevant governments to resolve the crisis immediately. Likewise, they should incorporate as a precondition in their ODA that human rights are always and at all times upheld and protected.

All of us civil society organizations, people’s movements, and grassroots peoples present in this CSO forum will be with our Thai, Malaysian, Indonesian, Philippine and Bangladeshi brothers and sisters in pressuring their governments to continue exerting pressures until each and every innocent life stranded at sea is safely brought back to shore with their physical health back in the pink, their dignity restored. We call on the international community to join us in working together to address this humanitarian crisis, put pressures on the governments in the region to fulfill their commitment and responsibility.

The post-2015 SDGs are supposed to be guided by the motto “leave no one behind”. Let us not leave them on the sea to perish and not leave them to their vulnerable condition as a people – this is the immediate goal that we want all governments to take and achieve.