

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
95TH STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING
24 – 26 MARCH 2026

Regional Update for Asia Pacific
NGO Collective Statement – Oral Statement

Dear Chair, distinguished delegates,

This statement was developed through consultations with NGOs, including those led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

The Asia-Pacific region remains heavily affected by conflicts, disasters, and geopolitical transitions. In 2025, NGOs and RLOs faced shrinking civic space, major funding cuts, and restrictions on humanitarian access, limiting their ability to meet rising needs. Displaced people are among the most affected, yet they continue to show resilience and leadership in supporting their communities. However, refugee-led responses remain under-resourced despite proven effectiveness and close community ties.

Against this background, we wish to highlight:

First, Myanmar's crisis is driven by ongoing armed conflict and IHL and Human Rights violations. Civilians bear the brunt, with continued internal and cross-border displacement. Disasters like the March 2025 earthquake exacerbate challenges.

The Myanmar crisis will likely deteriorate. The high rate of people reported dead or missing at sea highlight serious regional protection gaps. Pushbacks, delayed disembarkation, and weak search-and-rescue arrangements expose refugees to criminal networks. Meanwhile, Bangladesh has recorded over 140,000 new Rohingya arrivals since 2023.

Funding cuts have weakened the humanitarian response, increasing protection risks. The suspension of resettlement programs (a 90% drop since 2024) sharply reduced third-country solutions. And without comprehensive legal frameworks, refugees remain vulnerable to arrest, detention, and deportation. We emphasize that premature returns risk renewed harm. Durable solutions require structural change in Myanmar, including restored rights and credible accountability.

While ASEAN engagement remains important, limited progress on the Five-Point Consensus highlights the need for renewed political momentum. Without progress toward ending violence and inclusive dialogue, humanitarian aid alone cannot address displacement. NGOs call for stronger regional commitments to promote refugee self-reliance through access to documentation, work, education, and freedom of movement, and for systematic inclusion of RLOs in coordination mechanisms. In this context, Thailand's August 2025 policy granting some refugees the right to work is encouraging.

In September, the UN High-Level Conference on Myanmar raised short-term visibility for the crisis but failed to generate momentum. NGOs call for a detailed, actionable roadmap with clear benchmarks, commitments, and sustained engagement with civil society in route-based coordination mechanisms.

Second, Afghanistan faces a prolonged humanitarian crisis marked by complex displacement and environmental disasters. Reduced funding disproportionately impacts Afghan women and girls, while restrictions on female humanitarian workers continue to hamper aid. Women-led groups—often first responders—are forced to scale back or close, increasing protection risks, including GBV. Moreover, funding cuts and limits on engagement with authorities hinder durable solutions.

In 2025, forced returns from Iran and Pakistan have further strained limited resources. In two years, Afghanistan's population has grown by 12%, with 4.8 million returnees, over half of them women and children. Many arrive in areas lacking housing, livelihoods, and humanitarian support, while already displaced communities struggle to host them. Nonetheless, IDP-led organizations remain excluded from planning and decision-making. We call for their systematic inclusion in coordination mechanisms.

Other countries show intentions to returning Afghans. Given current regional dynamics, millions could face forced return in 2026—an unsustainable prospect given Afghanistan's socio-economic conditions. Although recent UNHCR guidance no longer includes a general non-return advisory, it notes that many Afghans should not be returned, while due process, non-refoulement, and voluntariness must always be upheld.

NGOs and RLOs urge host countries to maintain protection space for Afghans and call on the international community to uphold responsibility-sharing in line with SSAR objectives. We encourage Iran, Pakistan, UNHCR and the Support Platform to work with Afghan authorities for gradual and dignified returns.

Sanctions must not hinder humanitarian action, and exemptions should be effectively implemented so that aid reaches civilians. Yet many local and IDP-led groups still face barriers to funding and payments, limiting their response capacity. Durable solutions must also include IDPs alongside refugees.

In conclusion, we commend the few countries that play a key role in advancing third country solutions in the region. They are positioned to lead on rights-based approaches, responsibility-sharing, and meaningful refugee participation.

Finally, we welcome the new High Commissioner Mr. Barham Salih! We look forward to working together to ensure access to asylum, advance meaningful refugee participation, and promote durable solutions.

This statement is available on [ICVANETWORK.ORG](https://www.icvanetwork.org).

Thank you.