

UNHCR: Putrajaya yet to respond to help offer
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The United Nation's refugee agency UNHCR today said it has yet to receive a formal response from Putrajaya on how it can assist in response operations to the thousands of migrants at sea bound for Malaysia.

A total 1,107 of migrants whose vessel washed up at the Langkawi shore were taken in earlier this month but the government said it will turn away seaworthy boats laden with migrants, believed to be victims of people smugglers.

UNHCR said it offered the government in medical aid and other provisions and technical advice on how to process the migrants.

UNHCR also offered to interview the migrants how held at an immigration centre in Sik, Kedah, to determine who among them require refuge and who can be safely repatriated home.

"At this time, UNHCR has not received a formal response from the government asking it to participate in any operational way, but stands ready to do so if required," a UNHCR spokesperson said in a statement.

Putrajaya said it will not take in the migrants, but will provide food and provisions as well as repair the boats before turning them away.

The boats are adrift in the Andaman Sea and Malacca Straits carrying thousands of men, women and children, after suspected people smugglers manning the boats abandoned shipped.

This is amidst a human trafficking crackdown, after mass graves believed to be of Rohingya human trafficking victims were found at the Malaysian-Thai border.

The agency said the roughly 700 Bangladeshis may not require refugee protection and can be sent back with the Bangladeshi government's cooperation.

However, UNHCR said the remaining migrants, the Rohingya of Myanmar, cannot be sent back home and need international protection.

More than 10,000 refugees who came to Malaysia have been resettled in third countries with the help of UNHCR, it said.

"It stands ready to continue supporting the Malaysian Government in managing this current humanitarian crisis," it said.

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