

## **Solidarity vigil for 'dead' Rohingyas in George Town**

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**By Susan Loone**

Several 'bodies' wrapped in black plastic bags were laid on the field of the Esplanade in George Town, as a group of civil society activists solemnly gathered around them.

They observed a minute of silence over the 'bodies', put out to symbolise Rohingya and Bangladeshi refugees who died at sea while escaping violence and oppression.

About 100 people attended the vigil for 'The People on the Boats' today, organised by several local NGOs - Aliran, Citizens International, Persatuan Sahabat Prihatin Pulau Pinang, Penang Stop Human Trafficking Campaign, and Suaram.

They sang solidarity songs played by street musicians and waved placards with words like 'No more dead at sea', 'No one is illegal', and 'Stop Human Trafficking'.

Spokesperson for the group James Lochhead said the NGOs have joined the Migrant Working Group coalition and are jointly working out what they can do to solve the crisis affecting the Rohingyas.

Lockhead welcomed the initiative by the Indonesian, Malaysian, and Thai governments to discuss the issue with Myanmar.

The issue caught international attention when over 1,000 refugees landed in Langkawi, Kedah, early this month.

According to international reports, thousands more are at sea and so far, the Phillipines, Indonesia, and Malaysia have decided to give them shelter.

### **Refugees 'ignored for years'**

"Let's not have the deaths and trauma repeated during our watch. They (the migrants arriving on boats) are not criminals.

"The real criminals are the unscrupulous governments and criminal syndicates and a world dominated by big businesses which put profit far above people who are often treated like commodities.

"We have known about the refugee problem for years but no one chose to do anything about it.

"Let us say to the Myanmar government: you are in breach of your duties to your citizens and to humanity, what you are doing is unacceptable and you must change," he stressed.

Well-known social activist Anwar Fazal (photo) reminded all about the three C's - conscience, compassion, and caring - that humans must practise in life.

"These 3Cs are advocated by all spiritualities," he said as he read out the various religious verses promoting humanity for Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Taoism.

PasMa spokesperson Sofian Mohd Zain gave a fiery speech asking the Malaysian government to be proactive in finding a solution to the Rohingya problem.

He urged Malaysia to play an important role, now that it is the chair of Asean for 2015.

Malaysia, he added, must refrain from being like the Organisation of Islamic Conference which did nothing to end the Palestinian crisis.

"Myanmar is carrying out ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims and we urge the country to stop doing this and give them citizenship.

"Even abusing a dog is a big issue, what more human beings? We hope Malaysia will be more proactive in this issue and not just act after others have done," he added.

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