

**DPM: Malaysia set to receive another 421 Syrian migrants**  
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**Muin Abdul Majid, Bernama**

Malaysia is set to receive another 421 Syrian migrants by year-end, reflecting its commitment to fulfil its international obligations on migration stemming from conflicts affecting other countries, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi told a United Nations meeting yesterday.

The Malaysian deputy prime minister stressed that Kuala Lumpur would remain steadfast in putting word into action but nonetheless pointed out that the issue of the authenticity of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees card needed to be addressed.

“I would strongly give my assurance that Malaysia would not neglect its international obligations and commitments in addressing conflict-induced migration caused by war, natural calamities, political unrest and armed conflicts,” he said.

Ahmad Zahid, who is leading the Malaysian delegation to the 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), said this when addressing the High Level Meeting on Addressing Large Movement of Refugees and Migrants in New York.

Speaking at the meeting in the presence of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the deputy prime minister alluded to Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak’s pledge during the 70th session of UNGA last year for Malaysia to receive 3,000 Syrian migrants over a period of three years, resulting from the conflicts in Syria and Iraq.

“I’m pleased to share at this august summit that we’ve received 79 Syrian migrants in two batches by May 2016, and we look forward to receiving another 421 Syrian migrants by year-end,” he told the UN gathering held amid tight security, with highly visible police presence in every corner of this cosmopolitan city of some 8.5 million people.

Malaysia had hosted 340 migrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1997 to 2003 through a similar humanitarian commitment.

“This strongly reflects Malaysia’s continuous devotion to this evolving issue,” Ahmad Zahid said at the meeting, his first official engagement at the UNGA.

Malaysia, he said, was no stranger to the refugee situation, having faced an exodus of the Vietnamese 'boat people' into the country in the early 1970s before their resettlement in third countries with the assistance of the UNHCR.

He noted that as of July 31, 2016, Malaysia still hosted 151,596 Persons of Concern (POC) comprising asylum seekers and refugees from 54 countries although the term 'refugee' was not defined under any of the country's domestic legislation.

"Despite not being a member of the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, Malaysia has always rendered its humanitarian assistance to such cases without compromising on its sovereignty, integrity and security," he said.

### **Lingering problems**

Ahmad Zahid took the opportunity to highlight lingering problems pertaining to the resettlement of the existing refugee population in Malaysia to third countries which, in certain circumstances, might take years.

He spoke about how this would adversely create economic, social, political and security problems to the country.

In this regard, he urged the UNHCR and other state parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its related Protocol to give serious attention and promptly act on it.

"Another teething problem pertaining to the existing refugee population in Malaysia is the authenticity of the UNHCR card issued to them.

"The way forward that I have mooted in my discussion with the UNHCR is the establishment of a Joint Task Force between Malaysia and UNHCR for the registration and issuance of the UNHCR card embedded with additional security features," he said.

Nevertheless, Ahmad Zahid acknowledged that the refugee determination status was solely at the discretion of the UNHCR.

Earlier in his speech, he commended Ban and UNGA's initiative in organising the meeting to galvanise UN member countries over the need for coordinated and complementary action on population movements and displacements.

He said migration had become and continued to be one of the important security challenges faced by Malaysia.

He noted that the most common forms of irregular or illegal migration were related to illegal labour migration, labour trafficking and/or sexual exploitation as well as those fleeing from persecution, discrimination, natural disasters, poverty and armed conflicts.

- *Bernama*

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