

Work with Asean in expediting refugees' resettlement, UNHCR told

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia urges the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to work closely with Asean to expedite the resettlement of UNHCR cardholders to third countries.

This was because the spillover effects from the Rakhine State crisis in Myanmar continued to impact the region, said Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

Speaking at the 36th Asean Summit, held digitally yesterday, he said while Malaysia had provided humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya and other refugees from Myanmar, the "situation cannot continue forever".

He said Malaysia had taken in refugees despite not being party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees requiring signatories to host displaced people.

"Malaysia continues to bear the brunt of this prolonged crisis, which still appears to have no foreseeable end.

"We can no longer take more as our resources and capacity are already stretched, compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, Malaysia is unfairly expected to do more to accommodate incoming refugees," he said at the vir-

tual summit hosted by Vietnam.

He said the spillover from the Rakhine crisis was affecting the region and the implications must to be addressed comprehensively.

He spoke on the Rohingya's increased risk to exploitation and cross-border crime, such as smuggling, human trafficking and slavery, in their home state of Rakhine and refugee camps.

"We must seriously prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, where human trafficking syndicates exploit the vulnerability of others in facilitating and profiting from the onward movement of those refugees to third countries.

"Their deprivation and frustration could also lead to potential recruitments by terrorists and extremists who have remained silent during the pandemic. Your Excellencies, their silence must never be misconstrued as inactivity as they still pose a serious security threat to us as a region.

"Asean must adopt a comprehensive approach to combat and contain the irregular movement of people. Without enhanced collaboration, these transnational issues will only pose increased threats to security, resulting in a

destabilised region which is of no benefit to us all."

Muhyiddin said the crisis had been drawn out for far too long and was not going to resolve itself.

He said the international community was also observing how Asean dealt with the matter.

He said while Asean must do more to help Myanmar, the latter also had to do more to help itself end the crisis so that development could take place meaningfully.

Myanmar State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, in response, concurred that terrorism and human trafficking were two of the issues faced in Rakhine.

"The prime minister of Malaysia rightly mentioned that terrorism and human trafficking are two of the dangers we face in Rakhine. I think these are faced by the whole world. And I hope we can all work together to address this issue positively and in a way that will promote not just stability and harmony within our region but across the whole world."

On another issue, Muhyiddin said Malaysia would continue to stand in solidarity with Palestine amid Israel's plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank.

Malaysia, he said, strongly re-

jected and condemned the plans laid out by Israel to annex parts of the occupied West Bank and Jordan Valley, which Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said was an extension of Washington DC's new peace deal.

The international community, he said, had to ensure that the plan never comes to pass.

"Malaysia will continue to stand in strong solidarity with the people of Palestine in the wake of Israeli aggression, and we call upon the international community, in particular the United Nations Security Council, to condemn and reject the Israeli annexation plan.

"The illegal and unilateral action by Israel clearly calls into question its sincerity towards a peaceful and lasting solution to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It also further diminishes the prospect of a two-state solution, which is supported by the international community."

Malaysia has long held that the creation of an independent state of Palestine through the two-state solution, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, is the only viable solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict.