

## **Malaysia Seeks Lebanon's Assistance over Syrian Migrants**

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**From Abdul Muin Majid**

NEW YORK, Sept 24 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has sought Lebanon's assistance in fulfilling its pledge to take in up to 3,000 Syrian migrants fleeing their war-torn country.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi noted that Lebanon, a country of over four million people, was currently hosting some 1.5 million Syrian refugees.

"It is a burden on Lebanon and we wish to welcome some of the Syrians to our country on humanitarian grounds as pledged by our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak," he said.

He told Malaysian media this after meeting Lebanese Prime Minister Tammam Saeb Salam on the side-lines of the 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly here.

In this regard, Ahmad Zahid, who is also Home Minister, said that Kuala Lumpur and Beirut could cooperate in a number of areas, including joint security screening for migrants that could potentially be temporarily relocated to Malaysia.

Alluding to a certain amount of fees imposed on Syrians for overstaying, he said Lebanon had been requested to look into this matter for potential Malaysia-bound migrants.

"We would also like Lebanon to render technical assistance to enable the Syrians to fly to Malaysia," Ahmad Zahid said.

Malaysia has so far received 79 Syrian migrants in two batches as of May, and is looking at receiving another 421 by year-end.

To a question, Ahmad Zahid said all safeguards, including early security screening, were being taken to ensure that Syrians relocated to Malaysia were free from any links to terror groups like Daesh.

He said Tammam was receptive of Malaysia's proposals, and that history might have had a role in this as the latter's father had visited Sri Taman when Tun Abdul Razak Hussein was serving as Malaysia's prime minister.

Sri Taman was the name of the former official residence of Tun Razak, Malaysia's second prime minister and father of the current prime minister, located in a leafy area of Kuala Lumpur.

Meanwhile, in a face-to-face discussion with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) chief Filippo Grandi, Ahmad Zahid relayed Malaysia's worries over the presence of the more than 150,000 refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR in the country.

The deputy prime minister expressed hope that the world refugee body could help expedite the

process of relocating them to third countries.

"We are aware of the financial constraints faced by UNHCR and IOM (International Organisation for Migration), but I hope that the United Nations will be able to channel sufficient funds for them to handle refugees not only in Malaysia, but other countries as well," he said.

He said Malaysia was also planning to host an international conference with a view to seeking a permanent solution to the presence of close to 60,000 ethnic Rohingyas in the country.

Ahmad Zahid said leaders from Myanmar, as well as nine other ASEAN countries and representatives from UNHCR, IOM and other relevant organisations, would be invited to take part in the event.

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.

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