

Malaysia: The plight of the Rohingyas

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There is no doubt that Malaysia continues to be the preferred country of destination for the hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas fleeing from the oppressive Myanmar military regime. It cannot be disputed that our nation can only do the best it can to provide support to those seeking refuge in our country.

But when we cage people - and in the process strip them of their self-respect and dignity just on account of their flight from suppression in their country of origin, we need to wonder whether we have lost our sense of humanity in the circumstances of our actions.

Millions of people have sought asylum as a result of upheavals arising from armed conflicts, acts of genocide, or geo-political voyeurism. In my view - at least in the ASEAN context, there is an urgent need to address the predicament of the Rohingyas.

For far too long, ASEAN has functioned as a toothless collective in addressing the blatant abuses of fundamental human rights so perpetuated by the Myanmar regime against the helpless Rohingyas. From being treated as persona non grata in their country and being persecuted for their ethnicity, the plight of the Rohingyas has not found a cohesive reaction from the ASEAN nations except for "window dressing" diplomatic representation.

I believe that under such circumstances, ASEAN has an obligation to demand that the Myanmar regime stops its systemic persecution of the Rohingyas. ASEAN ought to also demand that for Myanmar to reap the benefits of the ASEAN economic partnership, it must stop its inhumane treatment of the Rohingyas. Granted that ASEAN adopts a policy of non-interference with the sovereignty of its member's states, it, nevertheless, cannot stand on the sidelines and put on blinkers where fundamental human rights are outrageously trampled upon. ASEAN has a choice - continue to remain docile to the atrocities against the Rohingyas, or embark on a forceful cause of action against the Myanmar regime in an attempt to liberate the Rohingyas from their predicament.

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