



**Asia Pacific
Refugee Rights
Network**

Urgent Statement

17th of March 2020

The members of the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR) stand in solidarity with refugees and are fully mobilized to help contain the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate the impact on the most vulnerable, including refugees.

According to the World Health Organization, COVID-19 (also known as coronavirus) has afflicted over 168,019 people in at least 148 countries. We are yet to see the impact this will have on the global economy as countries like China to Italy go on lockdown. It is hard to navigate the unknown, but as we continue to better understand how to slow down the spread of COVID-19, we invite you to take this moment to remember the vulnerable communities who are being hit most by the border closures.

As we speak and consult with our refugee members in the region, we become even more concerned as the number of individuals with COVID-19 has increased exponentially, and along with millions of others, the future of tens of thousands of refugees has become more uncertain as countries have taken increasingly stringent containment measures. Millions of conflict-affected people - women, elderly, disabled, stateless, undocumented, children - are living in cramped refugee and displacement sites with desperately poor hygiene and sanitation facilities.

The people around the world have been asked to take precautionary measures as simple as a hand wash with soap, social distancing, or simply calling the doctor. But the question is, do refugees have access to a phone to even call a doctor? Do those in camps have access to any primary health? Are refugees privileged enough to have clean water or soap? Do refugees have space for 'social distancing' in detention centers, when dozens are pushed into same cell? Do they receive ongoing health alerts, the way we do through social media or via internet access? Do they have safety protocols to follow?

This is not the time to turn our backs on people living in less fortunate situations than ourselves. We must support those in need during these extraordinarily challenging times.

We are following the COVID-19 situation closely, and taking precautionary measures to push for prioritizing the health and well-being of all, including refugees and migrants. We must keep our humanity alive and show solidarity with refugees and displaced people during this time of widespread uncertainty. Nations are closing their borders and abandoning those living outside them. Let us not forget them. It is time to show them that we are not leaving them behind and alone.



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Therefore, APNOR calls upon the local, national, and international COVID-19 response actors as well as UNHCR and other UN agencies to immediately:

- **Enhance their emergency support to refugees in camps in response to the COVID-19 outbreaks**
- **Provide COVID-19 risk information packs that include safety protocols in multiple languages**
- **Address the critical and urgent lack of hygiene materials in the Thai-Burma border and Bangladesh camps.**
- **Provide free health care access to Afghan Refugees in Iran who have shown positive results to COVID-19 testing**
- **Provide access to health care services to all people affected by Pandemic regardless of their status**
- **Shift international aid to support refugees, including those whose livelihood has been impacted by the virus**

At the same time, APNOR acknowledges the support, courage and commitment of health experts, doctors, and nurses that are working tirelessly to help the lives of people. **We are seeking a number of bilingual health practitioners to join our webinar with refugees.** We are launching a series of webinars on information on precautions and COVID-19 related health issues in different languages and therefore any support to boost preparedness and prevention to address the immediate health needs of refugees will be highly appreciated.

Please stay tuned as we launch our first webinar!

For further information; please contact:

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