

ERT Advocacy Report Urges Thailand to Protect Rohingya Refugees

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Today, at a launch event in Bangkok, Thailand, The Equal Rights Trust, in partnership with the Institute for Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University (IHRP), published its new report *The Human Rights of Stateless Rohingya in Thailand*. The report is part of a series developed by ERT which aims to document the situation of the Rohingya – one of the world's most persecuted minority groups – both in their homeland, Myanmar, and in a number of other countries where they have fled seeking refuge: Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Thailand.

The Rohingya are an ethno-religious minority group from the Rakhine region of Myanmar, on the border with Bangladesh. The majority of Rohingya in Myanmar today are stateless, having been arbitrarily deprived of their nationality under the Burma Citizenship Law of 1982. There are an estimated 1.4 million Rohingya in Rakhine State in Myanmar, while over one million live as refugees and migrants in other countries in the region, having fled discrimination and abuse in Myanmar. Many of those residing outside Myanmar have no legal status and have not received protection as refugees. ERT has been working on the Rohingya issue since 2008, in the context of its global work exploring the links between statelessness and discrimination. In this time, ERT and others have documented the severe discrimination, exclusion and abuse faced by the Rohingya in Myanmar. Since March 2011, ERT and IHRP have been working together to document the situation of the Rohingya in other countries in the region, including Thailand.

Based on original testimony from Rohingya individuals in Thailand and those who have travelled on to Malaysia, ERT's report sheds new light on the human rights situation of this uniquely vulnerable community. The lack of an adequate refugee and/or statelessness protection framework in Thailand has resulted in the Rohingya being treated as irregular migrants with no access to basic human rights protection. ERT's research found that the Rohingya experience constant threats to their liberty and security when entering, living, working and travelling in the country. The failure to recognise the vulnerabilities of the Rohingya as refugees and stateless persons and to protect them has a discriminatory impact on them and their enjoyment of human rights. The report addresses the inequality and discrimination faced by stateless Rohingya in Thailand, and the resulting challenges faced in relation to detention and deportation, the exclusion of Rohingya children and the denial of the right to work.

ERT's report makes recommendations to the Thai government, focusing on the need for the state to observe its international obligations and to fully implement its domestic laws and policies, in order to strengthen the protection of Rohingya in the country.

The report was launched today, with a panel discussion, co-convened by ERT and IHRP, at the Foreign Correspondents' Club, Bangkok. Expert panellists Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn (Chulalongkorn University), Dr. Nirun Pitakwatchara (Human Rights Commission of Thailand), Saiful Huq Omi (photographer and activist) and Amal de Chickera (The Equal Rights Trust) spoke at the launch event on the challenges pertaining to the statelessness, inequality, discrimination and lack of human rights protection of the Rohingya in Thailand; the human rights situation in their country of origin; and the future of the Rohingya from a

Thai and regional perspective. The discussion was moderated by Professor Sriprapha Petcharamesree (Mahidol University).