

Statement: JRS calls for protection of those displaced by crisis in Myanmar 21st May 2021



Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) expresses concern for the dire humanitarian consequences of the crisis in Myanmar and calls for peace, protection, and *non-refoulement* of Myanmar citizens as they seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Government and military actors must refrain from all forms of violence against civilians, peaceful protestors, and journalists, and respect the fundamental human rights of all people in Myanmar, including freedom of peaceful

assembly, freedom of speech, and free flow of information.

Since February 1, over 10,000 refugees have fled Myanmar and 53,000 have been internally displaced as a result of the military coup. As Myanmar continues to experience ongoing violence, neighbouring countries have imposed strict border restrictions to refugees seeking international protection.

On May 9, more than 2,000 refugees from Myanmar were returned by the Thai Army. It is the latest of many pushbacks by Thailand putting refugees in grave danger. China and India have tightened its border restrictions citing COVID-19 but essentially barring entry of refugees. In March, Malaysia has deported more than a thousand Myanmar citizens exposing them to violence and insecurity.

JRS urges countries in the region to offer safety and protection for those seeking safety, to protect those refugees already within their borders, and to refrain from forcibly returning refugees. Countries can abide by international standards of protection and transparency while also putting in place measures that manage risks to public health.

JRS unites with Pope Francis in His call for peace: “I too kneel on the streets of Myanmar and say: stop the violence! I too extend my arms and say: let dialogue prevail!”

JRS urgently calls on countries across the region to offer refuge and protection to all those fleeing for safety. It is vital that anyone seeking asylum in another country is able to access it. Children, women, and men fleeing for their lives must not be returned to a place where their safety or freedom may be at risk. This principle of *non-refoulement* is a cornerstone of international law and is binding on all states.

Australia has an important role to play in the protection of people displaced by the crisis in Myanmar. Allowing Myanmar citizens on temporary visas to remain in Australia until it is safe to return is a welcome development. JRS urges Australia to engage with regional partners to offer refuge and protection to those in need of safety.

