



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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**Letter to the Editor**

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## **Response to Article in Malaymail titled “Time to Repatriate Rohingyas”**

This letter is in response to the article published in the Malay Mail on 27 April 2020 titled “Time to Repatriate Rohingyas” by Norman Fernandez. The Consumers’ Association of Penang (CAP) is highly disturbed by the xenophobic tone of the mentioned article as it completely goes against our Malaysian spirit.

The author is clearly misinformed as he keeps referencing rumours and/or facts that have already been determined to be fake news. For instance, the rumours about the situation at the Selayang market. According to the NGO groups Rohingya Women Development Network (RWDN) and Elom Empowerment (Elom), the Rohingya only make up a handful of the refugees there and they do not own any of the businesses - they are only wage workers.

There is also nothing wrong with asking for the right to work legally, and to have access to education and healthcare. The author seems to think that asking for these means that the Rohingya refugees are demanding equal rights as Malaysians, but this is not so. What they are asking for is that their rights as human beings be fulfilled. These things are what every living person in this day and age should be able to have.

They have never asked to be given Malaysian citizenship; the Rohingya refugees only ask for a temporary home. Through their representatives, official or otherwise, they have conveyed their feelings of gratitude for our patience and kindness shown so far.

Furthermore, to say that they only want to receive handouts from the Malaysian government and do not want to work is factually incorrect. As stated by a consortium of medical NGOs including MERCY Malaysia, the Malaysian Relief Agency (MRA), and the Islamic Medical Association of Malaysia’s Response and Relief Team (IMARET), the Rohingya refugees are getting much of their aid from the UNHCR and foreign funding. Rohingya refugees, if they can find work, are usually doing jobs that Malaysians refuse to do – as is the trend, most foreign workers take up the work that Malaysians reject. They are even taking risks by working as they cannot do so legally since our government does not recognise their refugee status but has labelled them as illegal immigrants instead. Rohingya refugees contribute to Malaysia’s GDP and they could even contribute by way of taxes if the government allowed them to legally work.

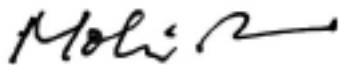
It is also appalling that the author labels the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia as “economic refugees”. They are clearly not economic refugees; they are an ethnic group fleeing unfair and deadly persecution. The genocide that has happened in Myanmar is real and the Rohingyas are the victims. The act of a few Rohingya rebels does not excuse the ethnic cleansing agenda by the Myanmar government.

It is also unfair for the author to question why they must come to Malaysia when the Rohingya refugees have Cox Bazaar in Bangladesh as well as other ASEAN countries that are closer to Myanmar. We must understand that for people fleeing genocide, they are not thinking about investment and “greener

pastures". The most important thing is safety, and this is what our Malaysian spirit has given them despite Malaysia not being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. There are also news articles stating that the Bhasan Char island is a swampy island that began to appear in 2006 and that there are doubts as to whether this island can resist the high winds and monsoon flooding that is prone to that area. As such, any reluctance of the Rohingya refugees to settle on this island is most likely due to safety concerns and not "because they cannot farm or fish" as the author has claimed.

Lastly, the racist comments in the article about inter-racial marriage is unsettling. It is normal for local couples of different races to get married and to have children. The same thing can happen between a local and a foreigner. As long as one of a child's parents is Malaysian then he or she is likely to also be Malaysian. If they are a stable and loving family unit and contribute to society, what is wrong with that? Families that exist because of inter-racial marriages are similar to families of same-race marriages. People who have the idea that only individuals of the same race or nationality can marry are full of prejudice and bigotry.

CAP's take on the Rohingya refugee issue has always been that they should be given their basic rights to work, education and healthcare as is stated in international law such as the 1951 Refugee Convention. Malaysia should also put pressure on Myanmar to stop the persecution and facilitate the return of the Rohingyas to their home and guarantee their Myanmar citizenship. We ask the government to be proactive in this endeavour and to get our neighbouring countries to follow suit.



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