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Disclaimer: I am not currently affiliated with the UNHCR nor have I ever been an official representative of the UNHCR in Malaysia or any other UNHCR office.

This summer I completed a 12-week internship with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. During this time, I worked in the Registration Unit, which receives all refugees who arrive to the UNHCR. For the registration process, the unit records individuals' biometrics and verifies identities through various interviews and appropriate documentation. As part of the unit, I conducted the initial interviews for asylum seekers. In addition to the first interview, I also completed family verification interviews, which helped current asylum seekers in the electronic system to add family members to their UNHCR file.

Over my 12 weeks, I interviewed over 280 asylum-seekers from Myanmar, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Syria. Additionally, I visited an immigration detention center to register 14 Rohingya refugees who were held there. For the main initial interview, I would enroll asylum-seekers in the electronic database and take biometric data after identity verification. Then I would complete a thorough interview with each adult in which I would ask questions about basic biodata, reasons for leaving his or her country, and living conditions in Malaysia. After the completion of the interview, I would identify any heightened risk or trauma of the individual and make referrals to other units of the UNHCR.

As an interviewer, I heard the stories of the asylum seekers that came into the office. This position gave me the unique opportunity to learn intricate details about several countries from first-hand accounts. While asylum seekers had different reasons for leaving their countries, their claims would often share themes. Depending on the country of origin, an asylum seeker may have fled due to problems such as active war zones, sexual or gender based violence, religious persecution, forced labor by military groups, clan violence or blanket persecution of their minority group. Their stories differed in hardships, but almost all asylum-seekers had a common sense of hope that their situation could improve. Their difficulties often did not end after leaving their country. Asylum seekers from Myanmar often travelled days or months in harsh conditions to come to Malaysia, while others had stayed in refugee camps before their arrival. Moreover, while often better than the active violence they fled, Malaysian conditions could also be challenging. Many asylum seekers had difficulty finding work, could not obtain legal documents, faced trauma from their experiences and faced overall economic problems.

Through my work, I also became familiar with the operations of the UNHCR in general and the distinct situation of the UNCHR in Malaysia. I shadowed different departments of the unit including the Refugee Status Determination unit, Resettlement unit, Education unit, Community Liaison unit, and I accompanied a registration team to one of the detention centers in Kuala Lumpur. These experiences increased my understanding of the resettlement process and how the UNHCR supports refugee communities while in Malaysia. Additionally, my time at the Malaysian office increased my knowledge about the Rohingya crisis, since 95% of refugees received at the office are Rohingya from Myanmar. Working in Malaysia also allowed me to learn about the specific problems in Malaysia and how the office operates since Malaysia is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which sets a foundation for basic refugee law around

the world. For instance, Malaysia does not have refugee camps and offers more mobility in the country. However, this limits the UNHCR's capabilities to offer services and to register asylum seekers throughout the entirety of Malaysia. Furthermore, refugees in Malaysia often face problems with immigration since Malaysia does not legally differentiate between economic migrants and refugees. A strong partnership between the UNHCR and the government has made it possible to work on these issues, but refugee protection in Malaysia still has many flaws. With my internship, I realized the immense good that the UNHCR tries to accomplish and in turn, the immense limitations of what it can achieve.

All in all, I am absolutely astounded by my experiences. I have been humbled by the opportunity and the people I have met along the way. This internship has given me a growing passion for refugees and refugee struggles as well as an understanding of the complexities and realities of humanitarian work. After the completion of this internship, I have solidified my career goal of working with the United Nations one day; I hope to be involved with a more hands-on community project or fieldwork such as distributing immediate humanitarian aid. My time in Malaysia helped me become more aware of the multifaceted nature of humanitarian aid and international organizations and allowed me to work with a truly amazing organization.