



Secretariat  
5<sup>th</sup> floor, 124-128 City Road  
London, EC1V 2NJ  
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7324 2975  
Fax: +44(0) 20 7324 2977  
Email: [contact@idpc.net](mailto:contact@idpc.net)  
Web: [www.idpc.net](http://www.idpc.net)

21 May 2018

Editor  
Nikkei Asian Review

Dear Editor

On 5 May 2018, the *Nikkei Asian Review* published an article by Ammar Shahbazi with the title "[Bangladesh drugs gangs exploit Rohingya refugees](#)." The article made a number of conclusions based on little evidence, then linked them together to produce a sensationalist report that risks provoking an alarmist drug policy response and exposing Rohingya refugees to backlash.

First, the contributing writer Shahbazi claims that the influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh has resulted in the increased availability of methamphetamine pills (commonly known as 'yaba'). Shahbazi asserts that this alleged increase is based on the "dramatic fall of more than 50% in the price," which is established only by the estimation of a person named Kashif Khan identified as a "Yaba addict" in the article.

Second, Shahbazi claims that Rohingya refugees "have brought problems" as "[s]ome drug traffickers have taken advantage of the desperate refugees, using them as couriers of their products." There is no supporting evidence for this claim in the article, only a statement from the head of Bangladesh's Department of Narcotics Control, who claimed that working as a "drug mule" was a "major option for a refugee to get to Bangladesh."

The deportation of Rohingya from Myanmar has particularly affected Bangladesh. Since October 2016, the Myanmar authorities forced more than 715,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh, causing a humanitarian crisis. The issue of drugs in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh should be treated as a protection issue and the Government of Bangladesh should ensure their protection.

My colleagues and I at the International Drug Policy Consortium, a global network of civil society organisations advocating for evidence-based drug policies that achieve improved outcomes for health, human rights, and development, appreciate ethical journalism and reports that are supported by evidence. Mr. Shahbazi's article was neither. Sensationalist and inflammatory reporting such as this can cause serious harm. Similar reports of this nature have fuelled horrific human rights violations against people suspected of using or having other involvement with drugs, around the world but notably in Asia, including extra-judicial killings, use of the death penalty, torture, arbitrary detention, and denial of medical care. We trust the *Nikkei Asian Review* will engage in responsible and rigorous reporting of these sensitive issues in the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ann Fordham', with a stylized star or asterisk symbol above the 'A'.

Ann Fordham  
Executive Director