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Two Years On: Rohingya Deserve Justice, A Place at the Table

61 NGOs warn of worsening crisis in Myanmar; call for refugees' engagement on safe, voluntary returns

21 August 2019

Two years after mass atrocities in Myanmar forced more than 740,000 people to flee for their lives, the Government and the people of Bangladesh continue to generously host nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees. While UN agencies and over 130 local, national, and international NGOs have supported the Government of Bangladesh to provide life-sustaining assistance, refugees require much more than basic support for survival; they need their rights, security and dignity. Many long to return but fear further violence and persecution back home.

Refugees report feeling fearful and anxious following recent reports about possible expedited repatriation to Myanmar in the current conditions which do not guarantee their safety and rights. Current levels of engagement do not afford them their right to make informed decisions about their future, including voluntary return.

Worsening Conditions in Rakhine State (Myanmar)

Discriminatory policies in Myanmar mean that Rohingya communities in Rakhine State continue to face severe movement restrictions, as well as limited access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods opportunities. Some 128,000 displaced Rohingya and other Muslim communities have remained trapped in confined camps in central Rakhine State since 2012, unable to return home.

Since April 2017, the Government of Myanmar has taken initial steps towards the “closure” of some of these camps for internally displaced people in Rakhine State. New structures have been built on or next to existing sites, but there has been no meaningful progress on freedom of movement or human rights. Consultation with displaced communities is limited, and they remain unable to return to their original communities or another location of choice. Achieving durable solutions requires that the Myanmar government address the fundamental issues of equal rights and ensure that all communities in Rakhine State can live in safety, access basic services and pursue livelihoods opportunities.

The conditions in Myanmar are not conducive to the Rohingya refugees' return at this time. As a recent [report](#) by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute found, not only have preparations for return been minimal, but authorities continue to raze Rohingya villages to make room for military bases and potential repatriation camps. The recent upsurge in violence has worsened the already precarious humanitarian situation in central and northern Rakhine State.

Striving for Dignity in Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh)

For the past two years, Rohingya refugees have remained dependent on humanitarian aid in the camps in Cox's Bazar. The collective efforts of the humanitarian community under the leadership of the Government of Bangladesh have improved camp conditions, strengthened monsoon preparedness and helped prevent disease outbreaks.

Yet, living conditions in the camps remain dire, with growing concerns about safety and security. Gender-based violence and restricted freedom of movement increase the risks faced by refugee women and girls. Persons with

disabilities and serious medical conditions experience barriers in accessing essential services. With shrinking funds¹ and continued restrictions on refugees' access to education and livelihoods, the crisis is likely to worsen.

The Government of Bangladesh and generous residents of Teknaf and Ukhiya Upazilas in Cox's Bazar were the first responders when refugees arrived in Bangladesh in August 2017. Today, some 500,000 Bangladeshis living near the camps continue to bear the socio-economic and environmental impact of the influx, amidst growing tensions with refugees over limited resources and services.

The international community must respond and stand beside Bangladesh to deliver a well-funded response that will improve living conditions and allow refugees and host communities to live in dignity.

NGOs in Bangladesh and Myanmar committed to providing assistance, but call for critical action by all parties

In response to the current crisis, we, the undersigned national and international organizations in Bangladesh and Myanmar, remain committed to providing assistance and protecting the rights of refugees, stateless, internally displaced persons and host communities until appropriate solutions to their displacement within and outside Myanmar are identified, including safe and voluntary repatriation. We urge all parties to:

- **Ensure meaningful participation of Rohingya in decision making processes about their future:** In light of ongoing discussions to expedite returns, the Rohingya must be meaningfully engaged by the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh in any discussions and decision making about their future (including their safe and voluntary return) through an inclusive process involving children, youth, women, elderly and persons with disabilities.
- **Respect Rohingya's human rights in Myanmar:** We call on the Government of Myanmar to address the root causes of the crisis in Rakhine State by implementing the Rakhine Advisory Commission recommendations and create the conditions necessary to end Rohingya's displacement while respecting each refugee's right to make a free, informed decision about their return. This must also reflect calls by Rohingya communities for justice and accountability, citizenship, protection of civilians, freedom of movement, as well as non-discrimination and sustained access for humanitarian organizations, independent journalists and media in Rakhine State, in line with international standards. We urge the international community to support these efforts, by condemning past and ongoing violence in Myanmar and call on the Government of Myanmar to ensure full respect for human rights.
- **Support Rohingya's inclusive access to education, livelihoods and protection:** We call for the creation of an enabling environment for Rohingya on both sides of the border to access rights and services, such as education, skills training and livelihoods. We urge both governments to reduce the vulnerability of Rohingya and host communities by strengthening protection systems and access to justice for all. We appeal to the international community to fully fund the [2019 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis](#) and the [2019 Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan](#) to ensure uninterrupted, life-sustaining services to IDPs, refugees and host communities.
- **Identify medium/long-term solutions:** We call on the international community to identify appropriate solutions to the Rohingya's displacement within and outside Myanmar while continuing to support the Government of Bangladesh, progressively implementing the commitments of the Global Compact on Refugees on self-reliance and responsibility-sharing and pursuing a regional solutions approach to address the needs of displaced and host communities.

¹ Funding commitments for the response remain insufficient—with only 34% of the joint 2019 humanitarian appeal worth USD 920 million covered.

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List of signatories:

1. ACTED
2. Action Against Hunger (ACF)
3. ActionAid Bangladesh
4. Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Bangladesh
5. Arts for Action & The Just Acts Consortium
6. Asian Dignity Initiative
7. Association for Pisciculture and Cattle Development (APCD)
8. CARE
9. Caritas Bangladesh
10. Catholic Relief Services (CRS)
11. CBM
12. Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS)
13. Center for Social Integrity (CSI)
14. Centre for Disability in Development (CDD)
15. Christian Aid
16. Community Development Centre (CODEC)
17. Community Partners International (CPI)
18. Concern Worldwide
19. Consortium of Dutch NGOs (CDN/ZOA)
20. Cox's Bazar Environment, Human Rights and Development Forum (CEHRDF)
21. Danish Refugee Council (DRC)
22. Development Initiative for Social Advancement (DISA) Bangladesh
23. Education and Development Foundation (EDUCO)
24. Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK)
25. Good Neighbors Bangladesh
26. HelpAge International Bangladesh
27. HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation
28. HOPE Foundation
29. HumaniTerra International (HTI)
30. ICCO Cooperation
31. International Rescue Committee (IRC)
32. ISDE Bangladesh
33. MAF Bangladesh
34. Medair
35. Médecins du Monde
36. Mercy Corps
37. Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS)
38. Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)
39. Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
40. Oxfam International
41. Peace Winds Japan (PWJ)
42. Prantic Unnayan Society
43. RDRS Bangladesh
44. RISDA Bangladesh
45. Safer World
46. Samaj Kalyan Unnayan Shangstha (SKUS)
47. Save the Children
48. Sheba Manab Kallyan Kendra (SMKK)
49. SHED Bangladesh
50. Shushilan
51. Social Assistance and Rehabilitation for the Physically Vulnerable (SARPV)
52. Solidarités International (SI)
53. Terre des Hommes (TdH)
54. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF)
55. Unite Theatre for Social Action (UTSA)
56. United Purpose
57. Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)
58. Welthungerhilfe (WHH)
59. World Concern
60. World Vision
61. Young Power in Social Action (YPSA)