



From Violence and Persecution to Marginalization and Displacement

The Tragedy of Rohingya Refugees Fleeing to Bangladesh



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Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights acknowledged that all human beings are equal in rights and dignity without any discrimination as to race, religion, or national origin. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination affirms that discrimination between human beings on the grounds of race, color or ethnic origin constitutes an obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations between nations and a reality that would undermine peace and security, and disturb the harmony between people living side by side even within a single state¹. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in its second article, recognizes the need for states to ensure respect for all and guarantee the rights recognized for all individuals there under their jurisdiction without any discrimination based on race, color, sex, language, religion, opinion, or origin².

Under these texts, states parties are obligated to respect and guarantee the human rights of citizens and non-citizens residing in their territory. Although the Myanmar authorities have not taken any steps to accede to the aforementioned treaties, the state's failure to be a party to these and other human rights treaties cannot be an excuse to commit violations or practices that violate human rights or to practice discrimination on any grounds.

Since the end of August 2017, the Myanmar army and security forces have been involved in perpetrating large-scale ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya Muslim minority in Rakhine State, in the northwestern region of Myanmar. The repression and ethnic cleansing carried out by the Myanmar authorities against the Rohingya minority came as a response to the armed attacks that were carried out by members of the Rohingya Salvation Army in the early morning of August 25, 2017, on a Myanmar army base and thirty Border Patrol police stations stretching across the towns of Butheedong, Maungdaw, and Rathedaung in northern Rakhine State, killing at least 59 armed assailants, 10 Myanmar police officers, one immigration officer, and another soldier.³

As a result of the massive human rights violations and human rights abuses committed by the Myanmar army forces against the Muslim Rohingya minority, some of which naturally amount to crimes of ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity,

¹ للمزيد يرجى الرجوع إلى ديباجة الاتفاقية الدولية للقضاء على جميع أشكال التمييز العنصري، الرابط،

<https://www.ohchr.org/AR/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CERD.aspx>

² للمزيد يرجى الرجوع إلى ديباجة العهد الدولي لحقوق المدنية والسياسية، الرابط،

<https://www.ohchr.org/AR/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>

³ تقرير المقرر الخاصة المعنية بحالة حقوق الإنسان في ميانمار، الجمعية العامة للأمم المتحدة، 24 مايو 2018، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3jO9a1O>

hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have been forced to flee as refugees to many neighboring countries, including India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Singapore. During the first two weeks of violence against the Rohingya following the August 25 attacks, more than 270,000 Rohingya refugees were forced to flee as refugees to Bangladesh, to escape from the systematic human rights violations committed against them by the Tatmadaw forces, which included, among others, mass killings, torture, forced displacement, sexual violence, gang rape, and enforced disappearances.⁴

With the Myanmar army and security forces continuing to commit systematic violence and ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya minority over the past five years, the Rohingya minority has been constantly flowing as refugees and migrants over the past years to the neighboring country of Bangladesh, and their numbers have continued to rise steadily until their number is now over a million refugees, more than 60 percent of them are children. Rohingya refugees are living in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char in Bangladesh, in extremely tragic and difficult conditions, as they suffer from severe overcrowding in camps, lack of food supplies, clean drinking water, and are subjected to the risk of flooding, landslides, hurricanes, and deadly fires, in addition to deprivation of access to health and medical services and appropriate education, and facing risks related to security and protection, especially with regard to cross-border attacks. In light of the foregoing, **Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights** seeks to highlight the tragic conditions lived by Rohingya refugees in refugee camps in Bangladesh, through analyzing a number of news and media materials obtained by Maat by browsing the internet, and through the information obtained by Maat by communicating with its local partners who made field visits to the camps inhabited by Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, which Maat reviews as follows:

Overcrowding in the camps

Rohingya refugees are living in catastrophic living conditions inside the camps in Bangladesh, as they suffer from severe overcrowding inside Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar district, which is the world's largest refugee camp inhabited by more than 1.2 million Rohingya refugees⁵, an average of 10.7 meters squares per person⁶. In fact, the overcrowding inside these camps had serious consequences for the living conditions of the refugees, as the severe overcrowding inside these camps affected the availability of

⁴المرجع السابق نفسه.

⁵ ROHINGYA CRISIS: CHALLENGES IN COX'S BAZAR CONTINUE, Action Against Hunger, August 26, 2021, link: <https://bit.ly/3uReM1K>

⁶ Cox's Bazar: The world's largest refugee settlement, Norwegian Refugee Council, 24. Aug 2018, link: <https://bit.ly/3vt26NA>

clean water, latrines and sanitation services, and the spread of stagnant water pools that attract mosquitoes, which necessarily led to the spread of infectious and deadly diseases and epidemics, including cholera, hepatitis, scabies, malaria, diphtheria, and COVID-19, which requires social distancing, self-isolation, and effective hygiene practices. In this context, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) considered the incidence of infectious diseases, especially scabies, inside the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar is constantly rising, as the organization estimated the cases of skin diseases caused by the deteriorating living conditions and severe overcrowding conditions in the camps in 2021 by more than double the number of cases that occurred in 2019.⁷

Describing the spread of infectious diseases and their danger to refugees in the Cox's Bazar camps in Bangladesh, Muhammad Salem, a refugee and father of a 13-month-old child with scabies, said, "The child would wake up between 8 or 10 times at night and was crying all the time." Another woman with scabies in a shelter in Hakim Bara camp says: "I itch all day, I can't sleep, I can barely eat...when the skin breaks, I bleed."⁸

Accordingly, the severe overcrowding of refugees inside the camps in Bangladesh is a major cause of the spread of communicable and contagious diseases, as well as at the same time a major challenge to the control and eradication of these diseases, due to the lack of sufficient water for bathing, washing clothes, and bedding, and as a result of people sharing very small and narrow spaces inside the camps, and because access to food, drinking water, and hygiene facilities, including latrines, generally require daily walking and long hours waiting in queues, which increases the chances of infection spreading among refugees. As soon as one person is infected, the infection spreads and travels with terrible speed within the camps and infects everyone.

Lack of food supplies and clean drinking water in the camps

Rohingya refugees, fleeing violence in Myanmar to camps in Bangladesh, are facing many challenges related to accessing clean and usable drinking water and adequate food, as the large number of Rohingya refugees residing in Bangladesh, which exceeds one million people, has imposed great pressure on available resources and quantities of available water and food in camps, while at the same time led to exacerbating the levels of food insecurity, hunger, poverty, malnutrition, and lack of water supply. According to the World Food Program, Over 86 percent of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are

⁷ Unprecedented increase of scabies cases in Cox's Bazar refugee camps, Médecins Sans Frontières, 25 March 2022, link: <https://bit.ly/3jSVZww>

⁸ Previous reference.

suffering severely from worsening poverty and hunger since the end of 2020⁹, and one in four Rohingya children in Kutupalong refugee camp are malnourished, and more than 80 percent of the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar camps depend entirely on food aid from the World Food Program for their survival.¹⁰

Rohingya refugees complain that the food rations they receive from relief organizations are corrupt and insufficient to feed their families for a whole month, as well as having to live on rice, dried fish, and lentils for many years. In this regard, a 30-year-old refugee woman describes the insufficient food that she receives during an interview with her inside the camp, she said, “Food is not enough, we have to buy all the items, we have to borrow rice from each other, and because food is scarce, we can’t lend to each other, so we have to buy rice by debt, and we have to buy dried fish, consumables, and all other things.”¹¹

Moreover, access to clean and potable water is a major challenge for the wide spectrum of Rohingya refugees residing in camps in Bangladesh, as according to the latest statistics in this regard, over 56 percent of Rohingya refugee families find it extremely difficult to access sources and points of water supply, which is mostly due to the long distance they have to travel back and forth to water distribution points that are many kilometers away from their places of residence, as well as the number of long waiting hours they spend in queues to get water. In addition to the challenge posed by the distance and long waiting hours, there is another challenge that is more affecting the refugees’ access to clean and potable water, which is the challenge of drinking water contamination and unsuitability for use. In this regard, a study based on the analysis of 12,650 samples of the drinking water that Rohingya refugees depend on in the camps, indicated the presence of fecal contamination in 28 percent of water samples taken directly from tube wells due to the presence of latrines next to these wells, as well as the presence of fecal contamination in 74 percent of water samples taken from domestic water storage vessels, in which families store their water needs due to inadequate hygiene practices.¹²

Risk of floods, landslides, hurricanes and deadly fires

⁹ Pandemic-hit Rohingya refugees and local Bangladeshis get help to grow food, UNHCR, 18 May 2021, link: <https://bit.ly/3Om9PWk>

¹⁰ Over 80% of the refugees in Cox's Bazar rely on WFP to survive, and we rely on you to make it possible, Global Food programme, link: <https://bit.ly/3JQRmOf>

¹¹ We also have dreams.. Ongoing safety and quality of life issues for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, Burma Human Rights Network, 8 February 2022, link: <https://bit.ly/3v0JUMt>

¹² Water insecurity in the Rohingya refugee camps of Bangladesh, International water security network, 7 September 2020, link: <https://bit.ly/3Eno74D>

Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee camps are constantly at risk of hurricanes, strong monsoon, floods, landslides, deliberate and deadly fires and other natural hazards and disasters that necessarily affect the living conditions of refugees throughout the year and often expose them to risk of death and injury. In this regard, Maat for Peace observed a devastating fire in January 2022 at a covid-19 treatment center in Cox's Bazar camp in Bangladesh as a result of which two persons were injured and parts of the center severely damaged, as it left them out of service. Deadly floods, heavy rains and landslides also hit refugee sites in Cox's Bazar in July 2021, destroying some 2,500 shelters, displacing more than 12,000 refugees and killing 11 others¹³. A devastating fire that broke out in Bangladesh's Kutupalong camp in March 2021 killed 15 people. Some 560 others were injured, including children, and more than 9,500 shelters and camps and 1,600 critical and vital infrastructure facilities, including hospitals, learning centers, aid distribution points and registration centers, were destroyed.¹⁴

Security and protection risks within camps

Rohingya refugees face security and protection risks within camps in Bangladesh gender-based violence", where violence is widespread, including gender-based violence, Murders, robberies, arson, human trafficking and kidnapping are spread by some of Bangladesh's local criminal gangs or armed groups from Myanmar carrying out cross-border attacks. In this regard, Maat for Peace has monitored numerous incidents involving unidentified armed groups, some of which are likely to belong to local criminal gangs or forces of the Rohingya Arakan Rescue Army (Arsa) or Tatmadaw forces in carrying out armed attacks inside the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, resulting in the death and injury of dozens of Rohingya refugees inside the camps. For example, the human rights defender and President of the Arakan Rohingya Peace and Human Rights Association, Mohabullah, was shot dead on September 29, 2021 by unknown persons likely to belong to the Rohingya Araja. In front of his office in Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar region, Mohabullah, who worked as an advocate for the rights of the Rohingya Muslim minority, is believed to have been killed because of his views on the need for all Rohingya refugees to return to their homes in Myanmar with dignity and the need for them to enjoy all the same rights after return, including the right to citizenship.¹⁵

بنغلاديش: فيضانات مميتة وانهيارات أرضية تلحق الأضرار بالاجئي الروهينجا، أخبار الأمم المتحدة، 23 يوليو 2021، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3uPmxVU>

فرق أممية تساعد عشرات آلاف اللاجئين الروهينجا بعد اندلاع حريق هائل في مخيم بنغلاديش، أخبار الأمم المتحدة، 23 مارس 2021، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3rz85PM>

¹⁵ Mission to Bangladesh 13 - 19 December 2021, United Nations .. Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 19 December 2021, link: <https://bit.ly/36iFbMo>

In the same context, unidentified gunmen were also involved in the killing of at least 7 people and the wounding of 20 others, on 22 October 2021, during a targeted attack "Dar Al-Ulama Islamic Seminar" at the Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, where militants indiscriminately shot some victims and knifed others, killing 4 Rohingya refugees immediately, while 3 others died after being taken to a nearby camp hospital.¹⁶

The frequency of these incidents has raised serious concerns among the entire Rohingya refugee population in the camps in Bangladesh, particularly human rights activists, in particular some of whom have received death threats from members of unknown armed militias. In fact, these incidents are a clear example of insecurity in refugee camps and clear attempts to silence all moderate voices in civil society demanding the return of Rohingya refugees to their homes in dignity and the enjoyment of all their fundamental rights, including the right to citizenship.

Denial of access to appropriate education, health and medical services

A wide spectrum of Rohingya refugees living in camps in Bangladesh and their children are currently denied access to appropriate education, health and medical services education policy against Rohingya children's right to education, especially in the official Bengali language, as part of its efforts to prevent the permanent integration and survival of Rohingya refugees in the country In this context, the Government of Bangladesh has imposed a ban on formal education for Rohingya refugees In December 2021, it issued a decision to close all private education programmes and facilities that had been operating in camps for the past years, claiming that such facilities were illegal and did not receive official work permits, which endangered the education of some 30,000 children benefiting from these programs.¹⁷

On a related note, **Mohammed Shweifi**, Principal of the Kayafuri Rohingya Refugee School, describes the shift in the Government's position in Bangladesh towards the Rohingya education facilities and schools after the Bangladeshi police closed the school he worked at on March 24, 2022, seized seats and whiteboards and confiscated his computer and printer: "**The police asked if we had any official permit for the school, we had nothing in writing, we had oral permission from the camp official to open the school, and now suddenly, the government of Bangladesh has decided to close it.**" A

¹⁶ swiss info: الرابط: 22 أكتوبر 2021، <https://bit.ly/3jThyx7>

¹⁷ Bangladesh: Rohingya Refugee Schools Face Closure, Human Rights Watch, December 18, 2021, link: <https://bit.ly/3vxq0HI>

girl named **Rabia Akter**, an eighth grader, described her frustration after the school was closed by the Bangladeshi government, saying: **"The closure shattered my dream of becoming an engineer."**¹⁸

Separately, Rohingya refugees face serious difficulties in accessing health and medical services in camps in Bangladesh. Overall, this is attributable to the small number of hospitals, facilities, medicines, equipment, and other medical supplies compared to the large numbers of refugees in the camps. In Bhasan Char camp, for example, there is only one 20-bed hospital providing medical services to tens of thousands of refugees and immigrants¹⁹ are often forced by the lack of medical facilities, hospitals and medicines to endure very long queues and boring waiting times in medical facilities inside camps, Or referral to seek treatment in Bangladeshi hospitals outside the camps, thus incurring high costs of medical care and degrading and poor treatment of Bangladeshi staff In this regard, a 28-year-old man describes his failure to receive treatment in the Cox's Bazar refugee camp: **"I had a sore stomach after I arrived in Bangladesh from Myanmar, and because of that pain, I couldn't eat anything, so I went to a Turkish hospital inside the camp. (NGO) for a consultation, initially, doctors couldn't diagnose the disease, although I went to them about three times, and when I went to the last time, they found it was a stone inside my stomach where they carefully examined me, I was told that the process for this stone could not be done inside the camp and I was also told to get out of the camps for surgery. After hearing that, I was very disappointed, because many different NGO hospitals are inside the camps and have a lot of money. But we refugees can't have any surgery inside it. We just have to get out of the camps. The stone had to be taken out by slashing my stomach through urgent surgery in a hospital outside the camps, which requires exorbitant funds and costs that I cannot afford."**²⁰

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the Rohingya refugees fleeing violence in Myanmar are in tragic and dire situations in Bangladesh. They reside in overcrowded camps lacking toilets and other decent living requirements food supply, shortage and contamination of drinking water, They are exposed to floods, landslides, hurricanes, deliberate and deadly fires, and are denied access to appropriate health, medical and educational care services, They face

¹⁸ Bangladesh Closes Rohingya Camp Private Schools, voa news, April 14, 2022, link: <https://bit.ly/3JWE8jc>

¹⁹ Mission to Bangladesh 13 - 19 December 2021, Previous reference.

²⁰ We also have dreams.. Ongoing safety and quality of life issues for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, Burma Human Rights Network, 8 February 2022, link: <https://bit.ly/3vOJUMt>

security and protection risks, especially in relation to cross-border attacks In the light of the above, **Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights** presents its recommendations to the international community, the Government of the State of Myanmar and Bangladesh as follows:

Recommendations to the international community:

- The need for the international community, in particular the United Nations, to press the Government of Myanmar to stop violence against the Rohingya minority, investigate violations committed and promptly bring perpetrators to justice.
- Lobbying for access to Myanmar by United Nations observers, the Truth Commission and human rights investigators to assess the current situation, as well as for access by independent observers and media representatives.
- Working to allow the resettlement of Rohingya refugees in third countries in cooperation with Bangladesh.
- Working to increase food supply and clean drinking water for refugees and develop livelihood programs that will reduce dependence on aid over time.
- Working to resolve the crisis with the Government of the State of Myanmar to ensure that more refugees do not flow into Bangladesh

Recommendations to Bangladesh

- Training security forces in camps to ensure a safer environment for refugees.
- Allowing Rohingya refugee children to enrol in formal schools, and cease to restrict the operation of private schools and community education programmes in camps.
- Working to provide the necessary medical services to Rohingya refugees inside and outside the camps at appropriate prices.

Recommendations to Myanmar

- Presenting a clear plan on how to facilitate the Rohingya's safe, sustainable and voluntary return, including specific steps to return them to their places of origin and compensate for their lost and destroyed property.
- Recognizing Rohingya as an ethnic group enjoying equal rights and full citizenship.