

Date: 4th March 2010

H.E. Sheikh Hasina Wajed
Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Prime Minister Office
Dhaka
Bangladesh

Subject: Concern on the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

Your Excellency

‘Assalamo Alaikum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barkatuh’

We would like to express our serious concern about the plight of Rohingyas in Bangladesh. We are dismayed by the current crackdown on unofficial Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Particularly from first week of January hundreds of unofficial Rohingya refugees were arrested, pushed back across the Burmese border or jailed under immigration law from Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts. As in danger, some of those who were pushed back to Burma were arrested, tortured, extorted and jailed by the Burmese junta's authorities.

In order for them to escape from the ongoing crackdown, a large number of unofficial Rohingya refugees, including those self-settled Rohingyas, have fled and flocked to Kutupalong makeshift camp in Ukhia in search of safety, where they receive no food assistance or succour from UNHCR or NGOs. While the refugees have to fend for themselves, they are being denied to a livelihood, as they are arrested by the law enforcement agencies and organized local villagers if they were to leave the camp to look for work to feed their families. A serious humanitarian disaster is looming due to food insecurity and starvation is spreading rapidly. During recent weeks more than 30 refugees are reported dead in Kutupalong makeshift camp.

The “Rohingya problem” is a problem of ethnic, religious and political persecution to rid Arakan of the Muslim population. The Rohingya are denied citizenship and are thus effectively stateless. They are victims of systematic, persistent and widespread human rights violations, including denial of citizenship rights, severe restrictions on freedom of movement, education, marriage and religion, forced labour, rape, land confiscation, arbitrary arrests, torture, extra-judicial killings and extortion on daily basis. Such human rights violations, which amount to ‘crimes against humanity’, are the root causes of their flights into Bangladesh in search of shelter and protection. As such, the unregistered Rohingya refugees are stateless asylum seekers, who fled systematic persecution in Burma, entitled to international protection, including shelter and humanitarian assistance from Bangladesh because of her geographical situation. In this connection, Bangladesh as necessary or at request should receive assistance from the world community. As mandated by the international community, the UNHCR has to play a greater role to ensure that these refugees are fully protected, are given assistance, and that durable solutions are sought.

The “Rohingya Refugee Crisis” is a problem rooted in the Burmese military’s junta’s specific deeply discriminatory policies targeting them, and the issue *must* be resolved first and foremost within Burma, where they are not recognized as an ethnic group and denied citizenship. Until these root causes are addressed by the ruling junta, Bangladesh, as a first country of asylum for most Rohingyas, has to bear the brunt of the Rohingya problem, as a cyclic matter. Arrests or pushback is not a solution. It only encourages accelerating the “Rohingya extermination” design of the ruling junta causing constant outflows of refugees from Arakan into Bangladesh and other countries.

Last not least, we are very appreciative of your giving shelter to our persecuted people time after time, on humanitarian ground, despite resource constraints. Having deep traditional and historical relationship in the bond of Islamic fraternity and contiguity in geographical position, Bangladesh is the only immediate place of refuge for our endangered people fleeing persecution in Burma.

We, therefore, urge your Excellency:

1. To immediately cease arrests, pushback and forced displacement of the unregistered Rohingya population in Bangladesh,
2. To recognise that unregistered Rohingyas are stateless asylum seekers fleeing systematic persecution in Burma and are refugees in need of international protection;
3. To provide them with adequate protection, access to livelihood and other basic necessities for life;
4. To involve and consult with UNHCR to ensure that these refugees are fully protected, are given assistance and that durable solutions are sought;
5. To exercise your good offices for a ‘permanent solution’ of the long standing Rohingya problem.

We thank you for your immediate attention in this matter.

Yours very truly,

1. Arakan Rohingya Refugee Committee, Malaysia
2. Arakan Rohingya Organisation Japan
3. Burmese Rohingya Association Japan
4. Burmese Rohingya Association Thailand
5. Burmese Rohingya Community in Australia
6. Burmese Rohingya Community in Norway
7. Burmese Rohingya Organisation Germany
8. Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK
9. Canadian Burmese Rohingya Association ,Canada
10. National Democratic Party for Human Rights (in Exile) Central, France
11. Oregon Rohingya Society, USA
12. Rohingya League for Democracy (Burma), KSA

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