



Bangladesh – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 5 December 2018

Is there evidence of discrimination or mistreatment of the Rohingya Muslim ethnic group by the State authorities or institutions in Bangladesh?

The Summary of a report from Refugees International, in a paragraph headed “The monsoon and cyclone seasons and crises to come”, states:

“The Rohingya are one of the most vulnerable populations in the world, survivors of a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. Now another humanitarian catastrophe is imminently threatening the nearly one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh with the beginning of the monsoon and cyclone seasons. The camps in which the Rohingya refugees live are extremely vulnerable to the impacts of monsoonal rains and cyclone strength winds. The humanitarian response, including preparation for the monsoon season, has been significant and substantial – but it has also been hamstrung by a number of obstacles and lack of effective management and coordination by the Government of Bangladesh and the United Nations system. Failure to overcome these challenges is unnecessarily putting lives at risk.” (Refugees International (23 May 2018) *Unnatural Disaster; Aid Restrictions Endangering Rohingya ahead of Monsoons in Bangladesh*, p.3)

See also paragraph headed “The Government of Bangladesh” which states:

“The Government of Bangladesh deserves tremendous credit for opening its borders to hundreds of thousands of fleeing Rohingya, providing land for refuge, and working with the international community to provide lifesaving aid. But at the same time, Bangladesh’s government has refused to recognize the Rohingya as refugees and to provide the rights and protections that go with that status. It has imposed restrictions on the use of durable materials to build shelters, limited the land granted for camps, and made it difficult for international humanitarians to gain the visas and approvals needed to provide aid to the Rohingya. It is also pursuing an ill-advised proposal to relocate the Rohingya refugees to Bhashan Char Island in the Bay of Bengal, posing unacceptable risks to their well-being, since the island is prone to significant cyclone and flooding risks.” (ibid, p.3)

In a section titled “A Humanitarian Crisis And The Looming Catastrophe” (paragraph headed “The Origins of the Crisis”) this report states:

“But alongside this overall commendable response, certain deficiencies cannot be ignored. More than 600,000 Rohingya are concentrated in one highly congested ‘mega- camp,’ which is now the largest refugee camp in the world. The government’s failure to recognize the Rohingya as refugees and its failure to give the Rohingya the accompanying rights has left them with limited access to justice, healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities.

More immediately, restrictions related to land access and shelter materials have made the Rohingya more vulnerable ahead of the coming monsoon and cyclone seasons.” (ibid, p.6)

See also paragraph headed “The Looming Catastrophe” which states:

“The camps for the Rohingya, especially the mega-camp, are highly congested and are made up of bamboo and plastic shelters, many built on the sides of dirt hills shorn of vegetation and prone to landslides or in low-lying areas prone to flooding. The seasonal rains begin in April and May, first with monsoon winds and related storms, and then with cyclones arriving shortly thereafter. Already, a few deaths have been reported after relatively moderate rains. UNHCR has identified 150,000 Rohingya as particularly vulnerable to flooding and landslides, and it has pressed for their urgent relocation. The Government of Bangladesh has granted hundreds of additional acres for this purpose; but clearance to work on the land was only granted in late March, and significant earthworks need be built to reinforce the hills. At the time of this report, only about 16,000 Rohingya have been relocated. As one humanitarian official warned RI, the window has closed for all but mitigation and “a massive disaster is coming.” (ibid, pp.6-7)

A report from Minority Rights Group International, in a section titled “Current issues”, states:

“The arrival of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar during the autumn of 2017 directed the world's attention to the mass atrocities taking place there as well as to the precarious nature of their exile in Bangladesh. As of June 2018, there are nearly 900,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, of whom over 700,000 have arrived since August 2017. Living conditions in the camps around Cox's Bazaar remain grim, with most refugees living in flimsy shelters which provide little protection against the harsh weather during Bangladesh's cyclone season. Despite continued violence and displacement inside Myanmar, the government of Bangladesh announced in early 2018 that it would shortly commence returning Rohingya to Myanmar. The announcement, made without consultation with Rohingya themselves, led to widespread international condemnation. The process was meant to start within days and end in two years, but shortly afterwards the Bangladesh authorities postponed the start due to delays in verifying the list of refugees to be returned. In May 2018, the Myanmar authorities signed a Memorandum of Understanding to allow UNDP and UNHCR into Rakhine state in order to monitor returns, although civil society activists complained that the terms were overly vague.

In general, the joint Bangladesh-Myanmar plans raise considerable concerns among Rohingya themselves as they call for the establishment of a transit camp in Hla Po Khaung, northern Rakhine and 11 designated settlement areas. Rohingya refugees fear that these will essentially serve as displaced camps and that they will be returned by the Bangladesh authorities to join the 120,000 who are currently internally displaced within Myanmar.” (Minority Rights Group International (July 2018) *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Bangladesh*)

A report published by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of Australia, in a section titled “People who identify as Rohingya (Rohingya)” (paragraph 3.12), states:

“DFAT understands there is widespread sympathy in Bangladesh for the Rohingya based on the perception that their persecution in Myanmar is due to their Muslim faith. Since the 1970s, official crackdowns, clearance operations and communal violence have led hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to flee Myanmar in successive waves to Bangladesh and other Southeast Asian countries.” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) (2 February 2018) *DFAT Country Information Report: Bangladesh*, p.11)

In paragraph 3.14 this section of the report states:

“The overwhelming majority of both new and previous Rohingya arrivals are located in Cox’s Bazar district, adjacent to the Myanmar border, which is one of Bangladesh’s poorest districts. In addition to high rates of poverty, crime, malnutrition and poor food security, the district is highly vulnerable to flooding caused by cyclones and the monsoon season. Over half of the new arrivals have sought shelter in and around two existing Rohingya refugee camps and in makeshift sites that existed before the influx. The unprecedented volume of new arrivals, coupled with the high numbers of earlier arrivals, has placed immense strain on infrastructure, services, the environment and the host population.” (ibid, p.12)

Paragraph 3.15 of this report refers to the ineligibility of Rohingya for Bangladeshi citizenship as follows:

“Regardless of their arrival date in Bangladesh, Rohingya are not eligible for citizenship (including through marriage) and are not legally entitled to work. DFAT understands that many Rohingya who arrived before 25 August 2017 have been able to work informally in Bangladesh using fraudulent identity documents, including National Identity Cards (see Rohingya Documentation). Local sources have reported that law enforcement agencies generally do not actively seek to enforce legal provisions restricting Rohingya access to employment, although Rohingya generally receive lower wages and poorer conditions than those available to locals. DFAT assesses as credible allegations that law enforcement agencies have demonstrated a reluctance to investigate crimes committed against Rohingya by Bangladeshi citizens, including serious crimes such as rape.” (ibid, p.12)

The 2017 US Department of State country report for Bangladesh, in a section titled “Freedom of Movement”, states:

“Starting on August 25, the country experienced an influx of more than 646,000 Rohingya migrants from Burma, more than doubling the existing refugee and undocumented migrant population in the refugee camps and makeshift settlements in Cox’s Bazar, near the Burmese border.

The government had a mixed record of cooperation during the year with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern. For example, the government restricted UNHCR access in the first eight months

of the year to only the 33,000 registered Rohingya refugees and did not allow UNHCR access to the undocumented Rohingya population, estimated to be 200,000-500,000 individuals prior to August. They lived in the towns and villages outside the two official refugee camps in Cox's Bazar District. The government also initially denied UNHCR unrestricted access to the new influx of Rohingya refugees during the post-August 25 mass influx. Following advocacy from UNHCR and the international community, the government agreed in late September to allow UNHCR to provide protection and assistance to the full population of Rohingya in Cox's Bazar. The government allowed access to International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other UN agencies to provide services to both the registered and undocumented Rohingya populations in Cox's Bazar, as well as the new arrivals, after August 25." (US Department of State (20 April 2018) *2017 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, pp.16-17)

In a section titled "Protection of Refugees" (paragraph headed "Access to Asylum") this report states:

"The law does not provide for granting asylum or refugee status, nor has the government established a formal system for providing protection to refugees. The government provided some protection and assistance to Rohingya from Burma resident in the country. The government cooperated with UNHCR to provide temporary protection and basic assistance to registered refugees resident in two official camps." (ibid, pp.19-20)

A paragraph in this section headed "Employment" states:

"The government did not authorize Rohingya refugees living in the country to work locally. Despite their movement restrictions, some refugees worked illegally as manual laborers or rickshaw pullers in the informal economy. Undocumented Rohingya also worked illegally, mostly in day-labor jobs." (ibid, p.20)

See also paragraph headed "Stateless Persons" which states:

"The Rohingya in the country were legally or de facto stateless. They could not acquire citizenship, nor does the government of Burma recognize them as citizens." (ibid, p.21)

A report from Médecins Sans Frontières states:

"As the mass exodus of Rohingya people fleeing violence and persecution in Myanmar's Rakhine state continues, refugee camps across the border in Bangladesh are struggling to provide the necessary space and resources to new arrivals. The already dire situation is further complicated by the impending rainy season, which stands to cause catastrophic flooding and threaten access to safe water and sanitation services throughout the sprawling camps.

In Camp 17, a new expansion to the massive Kutupalong-Balukhali megacamp in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district, 120 acres have been set aside to house both new arrivals from Myanmar and refugees from other areas of the camp in advance of potential flooding. But even this measure won't be enough to meet the needs. 'There just isn't enough land available;

the camp is too crowded,' said Francesco Segoni, emergency coordinator for Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). 'Where relocation is already happening, sanitation and hygiene conditions are below the minimum standards. When the rain comes, not only do we anticipate flooding and landslides, but also an exponential increase in the risk of a [disease] outbreak. Latrines will go underwater; contamination seems inevitable. We are bracing for the worst.'" (Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) (7 May 2018) *Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh: "Bracing for the worst" as the rainy season approaches*)

A report from Amnesty International states:

"On World Refugee Day, Amnesty International calls on the international community to urgently step up international assistance for more than 900,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar District as they face severe monsoon weather.

More than 200,000 Rohingya refugees are at risk of landslides and floods during the current monsoon season, according to the United Nations. Over the past five weeks, more than 28,000 people have been affected as 133 landslides have damaged more than 3,000 shelters." (Amnesty International (20 June 2018) *Bangladesh: International assistance urgently needed for Rohingya refugees*)

In a paragraph headed "Camp conditions" this report states:

"The assistance is needed to provide for the Rohingya's most basic needs in the camps, including access to adequate housing. Almost all of the shelters are currently composed of flimsy bamboo and tarpaulin, many of them perched precariously on mud hills. The Bangladesh government has imposed restrictions on building more permanent structures within the refugee camps.

In anticipation of the extreme weather, these settlements have merely been reinforced with further layers of bamboo and tarpaulin. While humanitarian workers have mounted operations to repair damaged settlements, the camps stretch over such an expanse that they cannot reach everyone. In almost all of the camps, there are no durable settlements, leaving them vulnerable to further weather events." (ibid)

A report published by the Bangladeshi human rights organisation Odhikar, in a section titled "Acts of genocide against Rohingyas in Myanmar " (paragraph 54), states:

"In the last few months, Odhikar and other local and international organisations have been warning about the floods, landslides and other upcoming dangers of the rainy season in Rohingya camps. No sooner had the first part of June gone, than the fears came true." (Odhikar (1 July 2018) *Half-yearly Human Rights Monitoring Report*, p.35)

In paragraph 55 this report states:

"In the morning of 11 June, due to continuous rain for a few days in the Rohingya camps at D-8 number hill of Ukhiya's Kutupalong refugee camp, a child died in a landslide and at least five hundred Rohingya refugees were

injured. 119 Rohingya refugees living in Kutupalong Camp said that at least 2500 refugees have suffered due to landslides brought by heavy rains. Along with them, more than 11,000 people have been affected. Due to mud accumulation on the road, communication and travel is almost impossible. Due to floods and water logging, it is difficult to enter the camp.” (ibid, p.36)

A report from Radio Free Asia states:

“At least 22 Rohingya people were slain through ‘internal’ disputes at refugee camps in Bangladesh during the past 11 months, according to police, but members of the uprooted community allege that ARSA insurgents were behind some of those killings.

Bangladeshi authorities have officially denied the presence of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, or ARSA, at camps in the country's southeast that house about a million Rohingya refugees who fled violence in Myanmar's neighboring Rakhine state.

‘Since August last year, 22 Rohingya have been killed in internal conflicts at the camps,’ Afrozul Haque Tutul, an additional superintendent of police in the district, told Benar News, an RFA-affiliated online news service. ‘We have been investigating the causes of the killings.’

About 1,000 police officials could barely cope with providing security at refugee camps in Ukhia and Teknaf – two sub-districts of Cox's Bazar that border Myanmar and where most of the refugees are concentrated, Tutul said.

‘We are really struggling to police over one million people who are unemployed. This is really tough,’ he said.” (Radio Free Asia (16 July 2018) *At least 22 Rohingya slain in refugee camps in 11 months: Bangladeshi police*)

A report from IRIN states:

“Seventeen-year-old Mohammad Zubayer once dreamed of finishing school and getting a government job so he could help his Rohingya community in Myanmar's Rakhine State.

But today he's a refugee living in Bangladesh, where the government bars formal education in the crowded camps, leaving a generation of young people like Mohammad out of school and stuck in limbo.

‘I wanted to be smart by studying,’ said Mohammad, who completed the eighth grade in Myanmar before fleeing to Bangladesh last year. ‘I wanted to be a scholar to help the Rohingya community. But kids who want to study are not getting the chance.’” (IRIN (28 May 2018) *A lost generation: No education, no dreams for Rohingya refugee children*)

See also Radio Free Asia report which states:

“More than a half-million Rohingya children in Bangladeshi refugee camps are being denied the chance of a proper education, UNICEF said Thursday, as a London-based NGO reported that one in two of the boys and girls who fled Myanmar without their parents were orphaned by brutal violence.

In a report marking one year since the start of a huge influx into southeastern Bangladesh of Rohingya fleeing extreme violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state, the U.N. Children's Fund warned that children living in muddy refugee camps in Cox's Bazar district face a bleak future, with few opportunities to learn and no idea when they might return home." (Radio Free Asia (24 August 2018) *UNICEF: 500,000 Rohingya refugee children face bleak future in Bangladesh*)

The 2017 US Department of State report on child labour in Bangladesh states:

"Since August 2017, the Burmese military has engaged in continued violence and acts of ethnic cleansing, resulting in more than 700,000 members of the Rohingya ethnic minority fleeing from Burma to Bangladesh. Nearly 400,000 of those displaced are children, some of whom are subjected to trafficking and labor exploitation in Bangladesh. There are reports that Rohingya children are exploited in bonded labor in the fish drying industry, predominantly found in the city of Cox's Bazar, while some Rohingya boys work on farms, in construction, or on fishing boats. Girls typically work in domestic service, in the homes of Bangladeshi families living up to 150 kilometers from the Rohingya refugee camps. Research found that some young girls who were promised jobs in domestic service were instead forced into commercial sexual exploitation." (US Department of State (20 September 2018) *2017 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor – Bangladesh*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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