

**Forum:** Human Rights Council

**Issue:** Upholding Human Rights of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh

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## Introduction

The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic minority group from Myanmar who "the United Nations has described as being "the most persecuted minority in the world." (unrefugees.org) Stateless and denied fundamental rights, their situation became mass in August 2017, when violence and abuse forced "more than 742,000 people—half of whom were children"—to flee. (unrefugees.org)

One of the world's largest, fast-growing refugee crises, this forced thousands to make dangerous journeys by land and sea to seek refuge and protection in Bangladesh. Today, nearly one million stateless Rohingya refugees reside in Bangladesh, predominantly in the overpopulated camps of Cox's Bazar, which now make up the world's largest refugee settlement. This has created a complex humanitarian crisis; over 95% of refugees are entirely dependent on aid, with limited access to education and livelihoods, while the community in Cox's Bazar carries a significant economic burden.

This committee is therefore confronted with the urgent challenge of safeguarding the human rights of this vulnerable group while delivering stability and support to the country and region.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Upholding

To support or to maintain something, to defend it and prevent it from being taken away. In this context, upholding means to protect and promote, to propose actions and cooperation to defend rights of the Rohingya.

### Rohingya

"The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic minority group who have lived for centuries in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar - formerly known as Burma. Despite living in Myanmar for many generations, the Rohingya are not recognized as an official ethnic group and have been denied citizenship since 1982, making them the world's largest stateless population. As a stateless population, Rohingya families are

denied basic rights and protection and are extremely vulnerable to exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and abuse.” (unrefugees.org)

## Refugees

A refugee is someone who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.(...)” (USCIS.gov)

## Repatriate

To send someone back to their own country or to return to one’s own country. A major push in this committee is to successfully repatriate the refugees while maintaining their basic human rights and at the same time fulfilling other important aspects of their life, such as education.

## Background

The Rohingya were identified to be the most persecuted people in the world by the United Nations. For generations, this Muslim community has lived in Myanmar, where they have faced constant discrimination and violence. One of the biggest problems is that they are officially stateless. Since 1982, Myanmar has refused to give them citizenship. Without it, they have almost no rights or protection, leaving them completely exposed to violence and abuse.

Things took a wrong turn in August 2017. A wave of targeted attacks and brutal violence swept through their home region. It was so bad that over 700,000 Rohingya had to run for their lives. Families walked for days through forests or cramming into overcrowded, shaking boats to cross the ocean. They had lost the place they used to live in, taking these huge risks for one reason: finding a home where they can sleep knowing they are safe.

Nearly a million people ended up in Bangladesh. Most ended up in the Cox’s Bazar area, a major refugee camp. What was supposed to be a temporary shelter has become a massive, crowded city made of simple materials, bamboo, and tarps. While they found temporary safety from dangers they were fleeing from, life in the camps was wasted away, waiting for handouts. A shocking 95% of families depend entirely on aid for food and basic human needs. They are not allowed to work in real jobs, and kids barely have schools to go to. The government of Bangladesh prohibited Rohingya children from accepting formal education from certified schools. This left an entire generation of Rohingya people without hope of higher education and ability to use skills to achieve better living conditions. If that’s not enough, Rohingya people were devastated physically and mentally. Insufficient

funding and humanitarians left many refugees starving; their food rations so little that they suffered from malnutrition. Poor sanitation and extremely dire situations of hygiene led to the spread of disease outbreaks, extensively increasing the amount of pain that the refugees must endure. On top of that, the monsoon season meant that the camps, mostly constructed from weak, unsafe materials, were easily beaten by the weather, the cyclones, landslides, and other natural disasters.

The situation was dire for everyone. More than half of the people living in the camps were under 18 years old, and most were women and children. The risk of abuse and violence was high. Armed groups have engaged in mass killings and torture of residents in camps. Rohingya people, minimally protected, were prone to abductions. The victims were tortured and kidnapped for ransom; some are even children. The people have no way of resisting, fearing the gangs too much to seek help from the police. What is even worse is that even the police were engaging in these inhumane behaviors, extorting money from refugees and even sexually harassing Rohingya women. Rapes of innocent women were filmed and posted on social media, and young girls were even forced to marry members of gangs under the pressure of these abuses of their basic human rights. This led to the psychological trauma of countless refugees. They suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), constantly tortured by anxiety and depression from the dire living conditions. The camps were also putting a huge strain on the local Bangladeshi communities, who have been incredibly generous even though their own resources were running out.

People were once again risking their lives on risky, deadly boat journeys. In 2023, the sea route people took was one of the most dangerous in the world. According to The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), “427 Rohingya perished at sea.” People were not ungrateful for the hard-earned shelter in Bangladesh; they are leaving because there is no future for them or their children there.

So that is the massive challenge we face in this committee. Not just a short-term emergency anymore; this issue is a long-term crisis. It is not just about how to keep people alive anymore, but it is about how we are supposed to give nearly a million people stuck in camps without any basic human rights to their life back? How do we make sure they have safety, schools, while also helping the country that took them in?

## Major Parties Involved

### Bangladesh

Bangladesh is the country that provided refuge to the Rohingya people. Opposes permanent settlement of refugees and supports the return of the Rohingya refugees to Myanmar. Bangladesh is not willing to provide extensive financial support, political support, or material

### Myanmar

Where the Rohingya people were persecuted, Myanmar has historically denied Rohingya as an ethnic group, refusing to grant citizenship to them. In this context, Myanmar’s main push was to avoid international

pressure and protect itself from the accusations posed by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of violating the genocide convention.

## China

Although in a strategic partnership with Myanmar, China remained neutral and facilitated meetings between Bangladesh and Myanmar on repatriation. China protects Myanmar from severe UN actions, while Myanmar provides access of the Indian Ocean to China. (See figure 1)



**Figure 1:** A map of how China cooperated with Myanmar (China Global South Project)

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1982	Myanmar enacted a citizenship law that officially denied the citizenship of Rohingya people. This made them stateless, becoming the root of their persecution.
June, 2012	Rohingya and Rakhine Buddhists had a conflict that caused a Buddhist woman to be raped and murdered. Homes were burned and thousands killed, and this event led to more than 120,000 Rohingya to be segregated into internationally displaced persons camps with harsh conditions.

August 25, 2017	Attacks were launched on 30 Myanmar police posts by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army. The military of Myanmar responded with a “clearance operation” that was brutal and on a large scale.
August 27, 2017	Over 745,000 Rohingya refugees fled to Bangladesh, and reports of many human rights violations emerge. This crisis became the fastest growing refugee crisis in the world at the time.
Late 2017	The Kutupalong-Balukhali camp complex in Cox's Bazar expands, becoming the largest refugee settlement in the world.
December, 2019	A case was filed at the International Court of Justice by the Gambia on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) that Myanmar violated the Genocide Convention.
February, 2021	Myanmar staged a coup, seizing power and control from the civilian government. The country delved into chaos.
2021-2024	Living conditions are dire for Rohingya refugees, and they face issues whether it is education, journeys on the sea, fires and floods, or even simply basic life. Refugees depend on humanitarian aid, and there is no clear solution to this crisis in sight.

## Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The most prominent efforts have focused on repatriation. In November 2017, Myanmar and Bangladesh outlined the return of refugees after the exodus, signing a bilateral agreement. However, the agreement was not clear enough on vital details, failing to guarantee the safety, citizenship, or fundamental rights of the returning Rohingya people. A second attempt was made in 2018, but it also did not turn out well. The reason for these failures is that the conditions in Myanmar's Rakhine State have not changed; the Rohingya are still denied citizenship, their villages deserted or destroyed, and the military responsible for the human rights violations is still in power. Consequently, no Rohingya wanted to return in these conditions.

A large humanitarian response has been coordinated in Bangladesh, led by the Bangladeshi government alongside the Human Rights Council from the UN, and a number of NGOs. This effort, mostly in Cox's Bazar, has successfully alleviated widespread famine and disease. However, this is merely a strategy and effort to prevent

risks, not a solution. It is underfunded, and the large dependence on aid is unsustainable for both the refugees and the countries.

An example of a UN resolution on the issue:

- Promotion and protection of human rights, 27 March, 2025 (A/RES/79/278)

## Possible Solutions

First of all, education is a large factor. Cooperations between countries to establish and fund camp schools that have formal, certified education could be really beneficial in this context. This provides the children of the Rohingya with a real future, and this benefit lasts until they eventually repatriate or settle elsewhere. Then, the skills of the other Rohingya's can be addressed. Direct funds may not benefit these refugees as much as valuable skills that they can use in jobs.

On top of that, humanitarian aid is essential. Basic healthcare needs must be provided to these refugees to maintain a healthy status. Funds could be given addressing the issues of malnutrition, diseases, or any other medical services. More importantly, support could be provided to alleviate their suffering from mental diseases and psychological issues. Efforts can also be made to reinforce the structural integrity of the camps, possibly preventing the risks of lives from dangerously built, flimsy structures in the camps, vulnerable to natural disasters.

Cooperation can lead to refugees to be able to work in specific jobs, and negotiations with the government could help these refugees find temporary jobs. Another dire issue to address is the sheer number of refugees in Bangladesh, and the pressure it puts on Bangladesh.

Efforts can be made to have these refugees re-settle in other countries willing to take in refugees, and this alleviates the burden of these refugees for Bangladesh. First, a focus can be on increasing the safety of dangerous overseas journeys, preventing the deaths of hundreds of Rohingya refugees. Other efforts can be made to reinforce the human rights of refugees within camps, economically support Bangladesh to help take care of refugees better, to finish investigations on Myanmar of violations and possible genocide, and overall to create more long-term solutions to this issue.

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