



for Human Rights, Democracy  
& Development in Burma

## **International Development Committee: Rohingya follow-up Submission from Burma Campaign UK 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020**

### **Q1. Please could you update us on the general situation in Cox's Bazar and your primary ongoing concerns for refugees in the camps.**

As an organisation which has a mandate to engage in advocacy to the international community on behalf of people from Burma, we are not operational in the refugee camps engaging in humanitarian assistance. This means we do not always have the most up to date information on the operation of humanitarian activities on the ground, but gives us some freedom to say things which some organisations are unable to say for fear of repercussions.

Key long-term problems which are not being addressed:

- 1) A reluctance by the government of Bangladesh to make the significant changes in policy needed to address what will be a long-term refugee crisis. This includes the need for more suitable, long-term living accommodation, provision of basic services, electricity and sanitation, and opportunities to work.
- 2) A continued approach by the government of Bangladesh to deliberately make conditions in the camp harsh, which they believe will deter more Rohingya coming to Bangladesh from Burma.
- 3) A lack of adequate financial support by donors. In 2019 the Joint Response Plan (JRP) received only 70% of the funds in needed. \$650 million instead of \$921 million. A shortfall of \$271 million. The target for 2020 is \$877 million, and there is expected to be a large shortfall again.
- 4) No serious international pressure on either the government of Burma or the military in Burma to change their approach to the Rohingya to a degree where it would be safe for Rohingya to return.

**Patrons:** The Rt Hon Gordon Brown, Sinead Cusack, The Rt Hon Lord Howard of Lympne QC, Clive James, Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, Baroness Glenys Kinnock, Maureen Lipman CBE, Roger Lyons, The Rt Hon Lord Steel of Aikwood

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**Q2. What have been the main challenges for coordinating the humanitarian response in the camps?**

The government of Bangladesh has been engaging with some agencies but not communicating well with others. It has not been communicating and engaging properly with Rohingya refugees themselves.

The problems of lack of coordination and information, and conflicting information and agendas, from the three government authorities, central government, local government, and the military, continues to be a problem.

The continuing ban on internet access in the camps makes the delivery and coordination of humanitarian assistance more difficult, as well as depriving Rohingya themselves of potentially life-saving information regarding COVID-19.

**Q3. What preparations are being undertaken to implement formal education and economic opportunities in the camps?**

An agreement by the government of Bangladesh to allow a formal education pilot programme has been hailed as a major breakthrough, and compared to the government's previous position of deliberately not allowing any Rohingya child a formal education, it was a welcome change in policy. However, the pilot is only for 10,000 children. There are more than 400,000 children in the camps, so only around 2 percent of children are temporarily being allowed a formal education. It is essential that even before this pilot is ended permission is given now for formal education for all children, so that work can start now to scale up informal education systems. If this does not happen, the vast majority of Rohingya children in the camps will be facing a fourth year without formal education.

The government of Bangladesh continues to deliberately obstruct Rohingya refugees from engaging in formal economic activities as part of its policy of deterring new refugees and refusing to accept this is a long-term refugee crisis. This causes more hardship and aid dependency, and pushes refugees into informal work which can be dangerous and low paid. Many Rohingya refugees want to work, and given the refusal of donors to provide enough aid it is vital these restrictions are lifted and a proper legal framework be put in place to allow Rohingya refugees to work.

**Q4. Gender based violence, including sexual exploitation and trafficking, appears to be a persistent problem in the camps. Why is this and what is the international community doing to prevent it?**

Refugees have told Burma Campaign UK that there is a general lack of law and order in the camps. They face a dilemma in that they want law and order, which the Bangladeshi

authorities are failing to provide, but at the same time fear those authorities because of their harsh and unfair treatment of refugees.

The harsh conditions in the camps and lack of humanitarian support, caused in most part by deliberate policies of the government of Bangladesh, but also in part by the failure of donors to provide sufficient financial assistance, makes women more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and trafficking.

A major problem which government, donors and agencies appear unwilling to address is the continuing and growing power of ARSA, or people claiming to be ARSA, in the camps. While official statements from ARSA call for respect for human rights, on the ground in the camps they act as a mafia-like militia who rule by fear. Their activities in the camps have moved beyond killings and other human rights violations against critics and those they believe are informants. Women are abducted, beaten, tortured and threatened for working. They are engaged in criminal activities and at the same time claim to be ensuring law and order in the camps. Those engaged in criminal activities can buy protection from ARSA. There is widespread fear of them in the camps. A lot more needs to be done to expose and address the breadth and scale of the activities of ARSA in the camps, and their role in human rights violations and criminal activities.

**Q5. What is your latest assessment of the plan to move some of the Rohingya to the island of Bhasan Char in the Bay of Bengal? Can this ever be a solution?**

The government of Bangladesh has repeatedly postponed its plans to move 100,000 Rohingya to Bhasan Char, in large part not because the plan is morally wrong, but rather because it is deeply flawed and impractical. It is essential that UN and other agencies refuse to co-operate in any way with the plan, as without their assistance it will be very hard for the government of Bangladesh to go ahead.

**Q6. What is being done to repatriate refugees and what are the obstacles?**

Cutting to the chase, there is one main obstacle to repatriation of Rohingya refugees. That is the refusal of the government of Burma to accept that Rohingya belong in Burma and have a right to citizenship. This is not an issue that can be tackled later on after a series of steps are taken towards this goal. That was the failed approach of the international community between 2012 and 2017, culminating in the military offensive in August 2017.

The genocide of the Rohingya does not simply constitute the military offensives of 2016 and 2017. It is also a long-standing policy by successive governments in Burma to deliberately make life in Burma so unbearable for the Rohingya that they either die or leave. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy government continued with that policy after taking power.

Aung San Suu Kyi does not control the military. Attention on her so-called silence on Rohingya rights, and then on her denial of human rights violations and defence of the

military at the International Court of Justice, diverts attention from the very serious genocidal crimes in areas where she does have control.

The endless committees and inquiries and promises she makes are all chaff. Look at her record.

She kept in place restrictions on humanitarian access to Rohingya internally displaced people in Rakhine State, which kills people. She kept in place a policy of denying formal education to children in those camps. She kept in place broader humanitarian restrictions to Rohingya populations in Rakhine State.

She has kept in place and continues to implement all the policies and laws designed to make life unbearable for the Rohingya. She is implementing what Amnesty International have called apartheid against the Rohingya.

Her government is taking no serious steps to create conditions that would be safe for Rohingya to return. She refuses to change the Citizenship Law and does not accept that Rohingya belong in Burma.

The United Nations Fact-Finding Mission detailed complicity by civilian authorities with the military offensive, and also detailed the laws and policies implemented by the civilian government which are part of the genocide against them.

The only significant pressure or practical sanction on Aung San Suu Kyi's government regarding their policies towards the Rohingya has been from Germany, which has suspended all development aid. The British government and other donors continue to give direct and indirect aid to and through the government. Aside from this, beyond words, Aung San Suu Kyi is paying no price for her policies against the Rohingya and so has little incentive to change them.

The military have also escaped significant sanctions. The UK as a then member of the EU implemented a visa ban and asset freeze against 14 lower level military and security personnel. They accepted that there was little chance that these 14 people had plans to visit the EU or had any assets there. In effect, it was a holiday ban in response to genocide, with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and other commanders who ordered the offensive not even included. Despite numerous requests, the British government refuses to disclose to Burma Campaign UK what assets, if any, have been frozen as a result of these sanctions.

The British government has made some small welcome steps which indicate a little more willingness to act. DFID and the British Embassy wrote to suppliers and recipients of UK aid asking them to avoid spending British aid on goods and services from military companies. The British government also welcomed the genocide case at the International Court of Justice, and welcomed the ruling on provisional measures. There has been a willingness to be more vocal on human rights concerns.

However, the British government does not currently support options such as sanctioning military companies, lobbying for a global arms embargo, and reviewing assistance to the government of Burma in light of its human rights record.