



BURMESE ROHINGYA ORGANISATION UK (BROUK)

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IDC Response – Follow up Questions on the Situation of Rohingya

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

1. Refugees everywhere in the world are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19 - this is especially true in Cox's Bazar. Almost one million Rohingya refugees are confined to an overcrowded camp where access to healthcare was difficult even before the pandemic, and the movements of Rohingya are restricted. Social distancing is not possible, neither is the thorough hand washing that is necessary to stop the spread of the disease. There is no chance of upholding personal hygiene or keeping surfaces clean.
2. Since September 2019, the Bangladesh government has blocked internet access in the camps and confiscated mobile SIM cards. They claim this is for security reasons. This is wrong in principle as it stops refugees from keeping in touch with their family in Myanmar and elsewhere and from informing themselves about what is going on in the world. In the context of a global pandemic, the decision to restrict communication is life threatening. People in the camps cannot access information about Covid-19. Initiatives to educate people about the spread of the disease become a lot harder when the prime medium for mass communication is taken out. It also increases the risk of person to person transmission, if all education must be done in face to face meetings. Furthermore, it means that people that experience symptoms and who should be contacting Bangladeshi health authorities cannot.
3. There are serious concerns about the effect of a larger Covid-19 outbreak in Bangladesh in general, and in the camps in Cox's Bazar specifically. Bangladesh currently lacks the necessary equipment and infrastructure to effectively deal with an outbreak.
4. An overriding problem in the camps is that we, the Rohingya, are not included in the planning, the discussions and the implementation of different projects in the camps. We want to be part of organising our own lives and be trusted with coordinating work and responses, but decisions are constantly being taken over our heads about our lives.

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

5. The mobile data ban is making the coordination efforts of humanitarian NGOs difficult and should be lifted immediately.
6. Bangladesh has limited all but “critical” aid; the delivery of services like education has stopped.
7. We are not being included in discussions about the humanitarian response in the camps, and have little input into what is being done and how. Donor agencies and Bangladeshi government officials are keeping us out of decisions that affect our lives.
8. There is general lack of communication from the Bangladeshi government to refugees about what is going on, and why.

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

9. Both education and economic opportunities are severely restricted in the camps. A pilot scheme for education was announced in January 2020 but as welcome as it was, it only included 10,000 Rohingya children. All Rohingya children need access to education in the camps, they have gone years now without any formal education and we are risking a lost generation. How will our children be able to build their lives independently if they have no education and later no means to earn money in adulthood?
10. The refugees in the camp are not allowed to leave to earn a livelihood and economic opportunities in the camps are severely limited.
11. Again, the refugees in the camps need to be included in the vital discussions and decisions on education and livelihoods. As it is now, negotiations take place between donors, the Bangladeshi government and agencies without us in the room. We want to organise ourselves but we are not allowed. They talk about us without us.

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?

12. The international community, and in particular donor countries, must work with the Government of Bangladesh and humanitarian actors to provide programming that prevents gender-based violence in the camps, and offers care to survivors.
13. There is a need to increase monitoring of trafficking activities in the camps, in particular during weekends and in the evenings when the presence of humanitarian actors is significantly smaller.
14. For decades, human traffickers have preyed on vulnerable Rohingya who are desperate to improve their lives in third countries. In February this year, 15 Rohingya refugees including 4 children drowned off the coast of Bangladesh in a boat that was bound for Malaysia, a trip organised by human traffickers. Denied citizenship and uprooted from their homes, Rohingya see few alternatives than to put our lives in the hands of unscrupulous traffickers. This is also true for many Rohingya in the camps in Bangladesh, where restrictions on education and opportunities to earn a livelihood, as well as the cramped living conditions, sometimes make a dangerous trip to Malaysia or Thailand aided by human traffickers seem like the less awful option. We are constantly told about the desperation the Rohingya in the camps feel about their situation.

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?

15. There are serious concerns about the move to Bhasan Char, and we welcome that the Government of Bangladesh has clearly stated the plan will not go ahead until UNHCR has been able to carry out a thorough assessment. Any move of refugees to Bhasan Char must be strictly voluntary, and refugees must be fully informed of the conditions facing them on the island, and of their human rights as refugees. It is crucial that refugees' human right to freedom of movement is not violated, and that they are able to access quality services.

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

16. At the moment, it appears that discussions about repatriating refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar have thankfully stalled. Bangladesh tried to repatriate some 2,000 refugees in August 2019, but Rohingya themselves refused to return. There is still an ongoing genocide against us in Myanmar - even if the worst of the violence has ended, Rohingya are still kept as virtual prisoners in Rakhine State, where their freedom of movement and access to basic services are heavily restricted. We are also denied citizenship in the country of our birth. Rohingya representatives must play a key role in all discussions around refugee returns.
17. Until the root causes of the current crisis are addressed, it will not be safe for any Rohingya to return to Myanmar. The international community needs to put real pressure on the government of Myanmar to stop its genocide against the Rohingya and accept us as full citizens of the country. The small measures that have been taken so far by the international community has had little effect, and these need to be stronger. Measures that needs to be taken, including by the British government, include supporting a global arms embargo, sanctions on military companies and a review of the aid that is going to or through the Burmese government.
18. Meanwhile, the camps in Bangladesh are chronically underfunded and the international community needs to deliver on life-saving aid for the Rohingya. The Government of Bangladesh should lift all restrictions on development and aid delivery in the camps. The Government of Bangladesh should furthermore sign the 1951 Refugee Convention and allow Rohingya to register as refugees, and make sure all Rohingya children receive an education.
19. The international community needs to put pressure on Myanmar to implement the provisional measures as set out by the International Court of Justice in January 2020.