

WORLD REFUGEE DAY

What humanity has chosen to forget



THE OVERTON WINDOW
ERESH OMAR JAMAL

ON December 4, 2000, the United Nations General Assembly in Resolution 55/76 decided that from 2001, June 20 would be observed as World Refugee Day, noting that 2001 marked the 50th anniversary of the

1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. This Convention, also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention, is a United Nations multilateral treaty that defines who is a refugee, setting out the rights of individuals who are granted asylum and the responsibilities of nations that grant them, by building on Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Article 1 of the 1951 Convention, as amended by the 1967 Protocol, defines a refugee as: "A person who owing to a 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."

Of course, the UN itself came into being at the time of the last great refugee crisis, when 40.7 million people were displaced from their homes across Europe, Africa, China, Asia, etc., after the Second World War. The same post-war chaos also gave birth to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which guaranteed a "right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution".

Years later, we are now witnessing the greatest movement of the uprooted that the world has ever known. Even more than during the Second World War, as some 65.3 million people were displaced from their homes, 21.3 million of them refugees, according to 2015 UN figures. With nearly one percent of the world's population



UN warns of 'slaughter of innocents' in Syrian refugee camp.

PHOTO: REUTERS

homeless and fleeing one form of persecution or the other, the crisis keeps getting worse and worse, owing to more and more wars, a lack of political cooperation between states and the world's desperation to look away from these helpless people in the hope of forgetting them — to avoid taking any responsibility for their fate.

The worst hit has clearly been the Syrians. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that half of the population of Syria will be in need of aid by the end of 2016. Already the appeal for aid related to the crisis is the highest in history — more than USD 5 billion. Meanwhile, 1 in 4 people in the neighbouring Lebanon, which

forbids the permanent construction of refugee camps, are refugees.

Under these conditions, Syrian refugees are being horrifically exploited. In 2016, Foreign Policy reported that "In April, 75 Syrian women were rescued from sexual slavery at a brothel in Lebanon. They had been beaten, tortured, electrocuted, and compelled to have sex more than 10 times a day. Increasing numbers of teenage Syrian girls are entering early marriages in order to receive financial and physical protection from their adult husbands." And, according to a 2014 United Nations Population Fund study, 41 percent of Syrian youths in Lebanon said that they have had suicidal

urges, living amidst the horrors surrounding them.

Closer to home, we have the Rohingya refugees. Between October 9, 2016, and January 5, 2017, over 65,000 of them were estimated to have fled Myanmar to Bangladesh, according to a report from the United Nations Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs. With its limited resources, the Bangladesh government has struggled severely to handle the influx of refugees.

Meanwhile, according to the OHCHR, the accounts of "torture, murder and gang-rape" suffered by the Rohingyas "at the hands of security forces were so severe they may

account to ethnic cleansing". Yet, the world at large is still reluctant to address this issue. However, despite the inhumane fate to which humanity has condemned the Rohingyas, the worst forgotten are perhaps still the Palestinians refugees.

In fact, after the Second World War, the world's refugee crisis, one could argue, had actually started with Israel's ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Palestinian population in both 1948 and in the 1967 Six Day War. Hence, the UN General Assembly mandated The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in 1949 to provide both relief and public works for Palestinian refugees.

The UNRWA today provides assistance to more than 5.2 million Palestinian refugees throughout the Middle East. Its assistance to Gaza is so crucial that it makes up about 14 percent of Gaza's GDP. However, in 2015, the UNRWA was unable to meet its financial obligations because of an increasing number of refugees to care for, decreasing funding and Israel's deliberate attempts to thwart its efforts, for example, by adding USD 7.5 million extra costs to its deliveries to Gaza. Ultimately, the UNRWA had to reduce funding to thousands of refugee families in Gaza and to Palestinian refugees from Syria, which is estimated to affect about 500,000 Palestinian children.

Countless more people from many more countries and regions are suffering in the same way. The consensus among peoples and countries that finally helped solve the refugee crisis after the Second World War is gravely missing today, along with the willingness to recognise the severity of the situation and the suffering of refugees.

That is why World Refugee Day is so important today. Perhaps, in remembering the plight of refugees across the world on this one day, we will recognise how we keep forgetting them for the rest of the year. And that if we didn't, perhaps, we would take the time to pressurise world leaders to the extent necessary for refugees to be treated with the humanity and dignity that they deserve. And who knows, perhaps, we could even do one better; ensure that no one is forced to leave their homes to stay alive, and become a refugee.

The writer is a member of the Editorial team at The Daily Star.

Robbing our children of their childhood

MD ABDUL QUAYYUM

JHARNA (not her real name), a 14-year-old girl living in Rayerbazar slum in Dhaka, fears that all her dreams may be dashed because of early marriage as she is from a community that expects girls to be married off and bear children even before they reach adulthood. Jharna, who is a child, doesn't want that. "I want to complete my studies first and enjoy my childhood like other children living in rich areas," she opines.

As a nation we have done little to protect children like Jharna. A recent report titled "Stolen Childhood" released by the international child rights organisation, Save the Children, on June 1, 2017, coinciding with International Children's Day, gives a rather grim picture of the state of child rights in Bangladesh. The report includes End of Childhood index, where Bangladesh is ranked 134th out of 172 countries, and the major reasons for this are child marriage, early pregnancy, poor health, violence against children, malnutrition, exclusion from education and child labour.

The report says, in Bangladesh 44 percent of girls aged 15-19 are married, which is one of the highest in the world. Marriage before age 18 is a violation of children's rights. It ends a girl's childhood by forcing her into adulthood and motherhood before she is physically and mentally ready. Globally, a girl under 15 gets married every seven seconds and every two seconds a girl gives birth,

according to the report. Half of all adolescent births occur in just seven countries, and Bangladesh is one of them along with Brazil, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria and the United States. Babies born to adolescent mothers face a substantially higher risk of dying and mothers aged 15-18 are less likely to be in school and more likely to struggle economically. This puts them and their children at risk of exploitation, ill health and perpetuating cycles of poverty, eventually robbing them of their childhood.

The rate of malnutrition is also high in Bangladesh with 36.1 percent of children aged 0-59 months suffering from stunting. Globally, one of two-thirds of stunted children live in ten countries and Bangladesh holds the eighth position with 5.5 million stunted children. The report says, despite the progress in medical science, many countries still have very high under-five mortality and every day more than 16,000 children die before reaching their fifth birthday, mostly from preventable causes. In Bangladesh, under-five mortality rate is 38 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Education is a right of every child but worldwide there are 263 million children out of school and they are mostly from excluded groups or from disadvantaged backgrounds, often girls, who live in slums or hard-to-reach areas. Their childhood ends quickly as instead of going to school they are forced to work or get married.

The Government of Bangladesh, with assistance from development



SOURCE: NEWSANDNUMBERS

partners, has made significant progress towards achieving universal primary education and gender parity, but poor quality of education, high dropout rates, lack of equity and access to education still remain significant obstacles. According to the "Stolen Childhood" report, 28 percent of children are still out of school in Bangladesh.

In addition to that, children in Bangladesh are exposed to severe

forms of physical and mental violence at home, workplace, institutions and other public places and it is increasing day by day.

All these factors are robbing a large number of children of their childhood in Bangladesh and at least 700 million children worldwide. This is the time for children to be in school and in the playground, to grow strong and confident with the love and encouragement of their

family and extended community of caring adults, to live free from fear, be safe from violence and be protected from abuse and exploitation.

The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), clearly defined childhood as a separate space from adulthood and recognised that what is appropriate for an adult may not be suitable for a child. Bangladesh, being a signatory to the 1989 UNCRC, must ensure that the

childhood of every last child is protected.

If the government wants to achieve all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), child rights should be at the heart of all development programmes as 40 percent of Bangladesh's population are children.

The government has introduced the 'child budget' in FY2015-16, but the question still remains, if the allocation is sufficient. In a recent view-exchange meeting on budget allocation for children, Deputy Speaker, M Fazle Rabbi Miah laid emphasis on more allocation for children in the national budget and proper use of allocated money. This year, Finance Minister AMA Muhith has proposed allocation of Tk 1,331.8 billion for an aggregate child-focused budget involving child-related programmes of 13 ministries and divisions for the next fiscal year. Proper monitoring of allocated money for children is equally important to ensure that the money is being used for every last child in Bangladesh.

It is unacceptable that in 2017 countless children in Bangladesh and around the world still do not have the right to learn, grow and play. If we are not even able to protect our children, how can we protect our future? If we—the politicians, businesspeople, social workers, teachers and media persons—do not act now, then we will be creating a much more dangerous world for generations to come.

The writer is Head of Communication and Media, Save the Children, Bangladesh.

A WORD A DAY



TOSKA
Russian

Sadness and melancholia; at its deepest and most painful, it is a sensation of great spiritual anguish, often without any specific cause.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 T-shirt size
 - 6 San Diego player
 - 11 Squirrel's find
 - 12 Perfect
 - 13 Base runner's act
 - 14 Barn areas
 - 15 Carpeter's need
 - 17 Golf peg
 - 18 St. Louis player
 - 22 Sky saucers
 - 23 Hitter's feat
 - 27 Sermon volume
 - 29 Slow mover
 - 30 Chances to hit
 - 32 List-ending abbr.
 - 33 Snakes
 - 35 Knight's address
 - 38 Crowd sound
- DOWN**
- 1 -- Vegas
 - 2 Play division
 - 3 Fish eggs
 - 4 Hitter's feat
 - 5 China's Chou --
 - 6 Temple supports
 - 7 Commotion
 - 8 Skilled
 - 9 Assess
 - 10 Otherwise
 - 16 Bank acct. addition
 - 18 Jose Abreu's birthplace
 - 19 Throw -- (flip out)
 - 20 Eddard Stark's heir on "Game of Thrones"
 - 21 Hitter's feat
 - 24 Noggin
 - 25 Teller of tales
 - 26 Building wings
 - 28 Unending
 - 31 -- Paulo
 - 34 Scruffs
 - 36 Steel ingredient
 - 37 Boxing site
 - 40 Pee Wee Reese's retired number
 - 42 Work leather
 - 43 Music buys
 - 44 TV's "-- Haw"

BEETLE BAILEY

IS MY COFFEE READY?
 YOU'LL HAVE TO DRINK INSTANT COFFEE. THE GRINDER BROKE.
 NO PROBLEM

GREEN MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

NO FAIR! HANNIE HAS ONE MORE ICE CUBE THAN ME!
 YEAH, BUT HIS JUICE WILL GET MORE WATERED DOWN THAN YOURS.
 GOOD POINT.
 NO FAIR!

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

P	O	S	S	L	I	C	K
O	R	I	O	N	E	P	E
S	A	L	T	S	A	G	A
I	N	A	S	E	C	R	O
E	G	G	M	U	R	M	U
S	E	E	B	R	E	A	S
			B	L	A	S	T
F	L	E	E	C	E	L	A
F	L	O	T	S	A	M	A
L	O	U		O	B	T	U
E	A	G	L	E	L	A	R
E	A	G	L	E	E	X	E
S	L	E	E	K	S	I	N