



Rasheda, a Rohingya refugee from Myanmar, sobs as she mourns the death of her two daughters and a sister in Ukha of Cox's Bazar. The three along with 17 other Rohingyas died on Thursday when a trawler capsized in the Bay near Inani beach.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Address human rights abuses in Myanmar

HRW and 87 other organisations urge UN

STAR REPORT

The United Nations General Assembly and Security Council should immediately take steps to address the human rights abuses and humanitarian catastrophe in Myanmar, said a coalition of Human Rights Watch (HRW) and 87 other civil society organisations yesterday.

"As more evidence emerges, it is clear that the atrocities committed by Myanmar state security forces amount to crimes against humanity," appealed the coalition.

"The United Nations and its member states need to take urgent action."

They urged UN delegations to immediately undertake efforts to adopt a resolution in the UN General Assembly addressing the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya people.

The coalition is also calling on the Security Council to seriously consider an arms embargo against the military and sanctions against individuals

responsible for the crimes and serious abuses.

"All concerned UN member states should also consider bilateral, multi-lateral, and regional actions they can take to place added pressure on the Myanmar government," the coalition said.

"In particular, we call on all states to immediately suspend military assistance and cooperation with Myanmar."

The HRW and the other organisations warn governments, UN officials, and diplomats that if they simply hold meetings and make speeches as atrocities continue in Myanmar, they will bear the risk of failing to use every diplomatic tool at their disposal to stop the ethnic cleansing campaign and further crimes against humanity.

"In the face of mass destruction, killings, and hundreds of thousands displaced, inaction should not be an option," the coalition observed.

Deep division, no action

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junta to stop persecution of minority and opposition groups. Their negative votes killed the measure at the UNSC.

It was a rare veto. According to a Reuters report on January 21, 2007, China and Russia had not cast a double veto since 1972. Through this move, they made the point the US needed to listen to their complaints carefully.

In defence, they argued that human rights violations were not the purview of the Security Council unless they endangered regional or international peace and security, which Myanmar did not.

Since then China and Russia have jointly been siding with Myanmar for their economic interests.

They again joined together in double veto in November 2009 to kill measures

in the UNSC. The draft resolution would have urged Myanmar to ease repression and release of political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

In casting their negative votes, the Russian and Chinese ambassadors argued that Burma, or Myanmar as it is known at the UN, should not be on the agenda of the Security Council, according to a report of Voice of America on November 1, 2009.

In March this year, they together blocked a short UNSC press statement on Myanmar which would have "noted with concern renewed fighting in some parts of the country and stressed the importance of humanitarian access to all affected areas."

After eruption of the ongoing violence, the UNSC sat at a close-door meeting at the end of August and discussed the situation. But the Chinese

ambassador strongly opposed UN's involvement to resolve the crisis.

In the wake of global outcry against the atrocities, China and Russia allowed the Security Council to issue a press statement urging Myanmar to end violence against Rohingyas. It was the first time in nine years that the Council had come together to issue a statement on Myanmar.

But the call fell flat.

China and Russia again did not pay heed to global outcry at Thursday's open meeting held amid exodus of Rohingyas to Bangladesh from Rakhine state of Myanmar and the UN chief call for taking strong action.

Sticking rigid to their stances, Beijing and Moscow rather questioned the UNSC's jurisdiction to take any measure and argued that any interference would worsen the situation in

Myanmar.

Russia's Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia warned that "excessive pressure" on Myanmar's government to resolve the crisis "could only aggravate the situation in the country and around it."

China's deputy UN ambassador condemned "recent violent attacks" in Myanmar but says "there is no quick fix" to the plight of Rohingyas.

Earlier this month, Myanmar government officials said they were negotiating with China and Russia to protect them from any possible action by the Security Council.

The above records, however, show the Council over the years has discussed Myanmar behind closed-doors, but could not move forward due to veto by China and Russia.

Thursday's open meeting was second

one after eight years. The last open meeting was held in 2009 when Ban Ki-moon was the Secretary-General.

Until Thursday, the line up among the UNSC permanent members remains same on Myanmar issue. The US, the UK and France have been vocal against human rights violation in Myanmar and want actions while China and Russia have been siding with Myanmar opposing any action.

Japan, Sweden, Bolivia and Egypt also spoke for ending the violence against the Rohingyas.

Formed in the aftermath of the Second World War with the core goal to prevent genocide, the UN has failed on many occasions due to lack of political commitment of the big nations enjoying veto power in the security council.

Against this backdrop, the call for restraining veto power has been grow-

ing over the past few years.

In 2013, France presented a proposal to the UN General Assembly to limit the use of the veto power in situations of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. France reiterated its stance in the general assembly in 2015.

That year, 107 countries placed a proposal in the general assembly for enacting a code of conduct to limit the exercise of the veto power in situation of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Both France and the UK have given their support to the proposed code of conduct. Three other members supported neither the France's initiative nor the proposed code of conduct.

This, too, exposed a sharp division among the permanent members of the UN's most powerful body.

Backing the systems of abuse, not victims

BBC investigation reveals how UN leadership in Myanmar tried to stop the Rohingya rights issue being raised with the govt

STAR REPORT

Amid the unfolding Rohingya crisis and the international pressure on Myanmar to stop ethnic cleansing, a BBC investigation has revealed that the UN leadership in Myanmar tried to stop the Rohingya rights issue being raised with the government.

One former UN official told the BBC that the head of the UN in Myanmar tried to prevent human rights advocates from visiting sensitive Rohingya areas.

Since August 25, more than 500,000 Rohingyas have crossed into Bangladesh fleeing an army crackdown in the Rakhine State.

From the start of the Rohingya influx, the UN has been at the forefront of the response. It has delivered aid and made strong statements condemning the Myanmar authorities.

But sources within the UN and the aid community both in Myanmar and outside have told the BBC that, in the four years before the current crisis, the head of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), a Canadian called Renata Lok-Dessallien tried to stop human rights activists travelling to Rohingya areas and isolated staff who

tried to warn that ethnic cleansing might be on the way.

The UN in Myanmar "strongly disagreed" with the BBC findings.

Multiple sources in Myanmar's aid community have told the BBC that at high-level UN meetings in Myanmar any question of asking the Burmese authorities to respect the Rohingyas' human rights became almost impossible.

One aid worker, Ms Vandanebeel, said it soon became clear to everyone that raising the Rohingyas' problems, or warning of ethnic cleansing in senior UN meetings, was simply not acceptable.

"Well you could do it but it had consequences," she said. "And it had negative consequences, like you were no longer invited to meetings and your travel authorisations were not cleared. Other staff were taken off jobs - and being humiliated in meetings. An atmosphere was created that talking about these issues was simply not on."

Repeat offenders, like the head of the UN's Office for the Co-ordination for Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA) were deliberately excluded from discussions.

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Voyage for safety ends

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women and children had been kept since Thursday night after the boat carrying them and other Rohingya refugees capsized near Patuarek of Ukha.

Four more bodies -- three children and a woman -- were recovered yesterday and brought to the school ground.

The victims fled violence in Myanmar to seek safety in Bangladesh, but they finally ended up dead.

Locals of Patuarek bathed the bodies and wrapped those in shrouds before the family members of the dead bade the last farewell in tears. They broke down in loud sobs, making the atmosphere heavy with grief and pain. Nothing and nobody could console them.

Thursday's tragedy is the latest in a series of incidents of boat capsizing. So far, 128 people have died in such incidents since desperate Rohingyas started pouring into Bangladesh from the strife-torn Rakhine State of Myanmar on August 25.

And still, they keep coming by ramshackle boats, risking their lives.

On Wednesday night, around 70 Rohingyas, including Zafar, his wife and their three sons boarded the small boat with their belongings. They all crammed in the small hull, and there was hardly any space for them to move.

But none of them could imagine the horrors that lay ahead.

"The boatmen told us that they would take us to Shah Porir Dwip -- a three-hour journey from the ghat where we boarded the boat. But they did not keep their word," said Zafar who managed to swim ashore.



Two local women carry a dead Rohingya child to bathe him before burial at Inani Sub-health Complex in Cox's Bazar yesterday. The child was among the 20 victims of a trawler capsizing near Inani beach on Thursday. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

He said the sea was rough and they got drenched several times. As the weather got worse on Thursday afternoon, the boatmen lost their way.

"The boat was close to the shore but couldn't make it... I have lost everything," he said, trying to choke back tears.

At the school ground, Nur Fatema of Myanmar's Mwai Daung village was crying inconsolably after she was given the last chance to see the body of her nine-month-old son Shahidur

Rahman.

Fatema, who is in her early 20s, embarked on the perilous journey with her husband Abdus Salam and their two sons -- Shahidur and three-year-old Abdur Rahman.

After boarding the small boat, she took Shahidur in the lap while her husband held Abdur in his arms.

"As the boat capsized, I took Shahidur on my shoulder. I grabbed a broken part of the boat to stay afloat but it was constantly

moving up and down in the wave.

"My son died in between," said the mother of two, with tears rolling down her cheeks.

After a while, she lost her grip on her son's body and almost drowned. Luckily, locals rescued her.

Her husband managed to swim ashore with their older son Abdur.

At least 21 Rohingyas were rescued, and 13 of them are receiving treatment at hospitals in Ukha and Cox's Bazar town.

Dhaka for safe, sustainable return of all

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state, we shall forge ahead seeking a peaceful and lasting solution to this protracted situation through diplomacy, dialogue and cooperation."

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made a five-point proposal at the UN General Assembly last week. The proposal has largely been echoed by the UN secretary-general and the UNSC members, he told the meeting in New York.

"Pursuant to those points, the immediate priorities should be to cease all forms of violence and ensure protection and humanitarian assistance for those affected or vulnerable in Rakhine State," Momen added.

He said Bangladesh prefers a joint verification process in the presence of international observers. "The forcibly

displaced Myanmar nationals should return to their places of original abode in safety, security and dignity."

Reiterating Hasina's stance, the envoy said the crisis has its roots in Myanmar and its solution has to be found there.

He said Bangladesh, however, remains committed to engaging with Myanmar and the international community for the resolution of this critical issue.

"Our experience over the last three decades makes it obvious that the bilateral track loses its momentum as soon as the international community shifts its attention elsewhere.

"We, therefore, urge this Council to keep this issue alive in its agenda and make sure that we manage to arrive to the point of its logical conclusion. We also invite the Council members to

conduct a field mission to Bangladesh and possibly to Myanmar to gather first-hand accounts of the unfolding humanitarian crisis," he told the UNSC.

The ambassador extended sincere appreciation and gratitude to all the UNSC members for showing support to Bangladesh.

According to the UN, over half a million people have entered Bangladesh fleeing violence in Rakhine since August 25.

Despite serious constraints, Bangladesh has given shelter to these distressed Rohingyas, mostly women and children.

"We are providing these forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals with basic and emergency humanitarian assistance. The international community has come forward in the spirit of

sharing responsibility, although the UN and other relevant partners are stretched beyond their capacity," said Momen.

Bangladesh is also carrying out biometric registration of the Rohingyas.

With the latest influx, Bangladesh is currently hosting over 900,000 Rohingyas. "This is an untenable situation, to say the least," the envoy said.

According to the ambassador, the indiscriminate killing and torture by the Myanmar security forces, aided by vigilante groups acting on religious and ethnic affiliation, has already been cited as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" by the UN high commissioner for human rights.

Under the circumstances, Momen said, it is of utmost importance that

the remaining Rohingya civilians in Rakhine were guaranteed unconditional protection by creating UN-administered "safe zones" inside Myanmar.

It must also be ensured that humanitarian assistance reaches all affected communities, in particular to the Rohingyas. Myanmar must ensure full and unfettered humanitarian access to the UN and other humanitarian agencies, he mentioned.

"There is perhaps no taker for the baseless and malicious propaganda to project Rohingyas as 'illegal immigrants from Bangladesh'. This is not only a blatant denial of the ethnic identity of the Rohingyas, but also an affront to Bangalees all over the world. This has to stop," Momen said.

The envoy called upon the UNSC

to take into account that more than two divisions of armed forces had been reportedly deployed by Myanmar in areas near the Bangladesh border since the first week of August.

Troops were spotted within 200 metres of the zero line, and heavy armaments and artillery were reportedly placed in close proximity of the Bangladesh border, he said.

There have been 19 reported incidents of Bangladesh's air space violation by Myanmar helicopters and drones, the envoy mentioned.

He said anti-personnel mines have reportedly been laid along the stretch of the border to prevent the return of Rohingyas to Myanmar and there have been incidents of firing on Bangladeshi fishermen, resulting in death of one.