



At an age of innovation and imagination, 450,000 children, adolescents and youth are faced with insurmountable barriers to education and opportunities. PHOTO: REUTERS

# ‘Rohingya refugees need education to take control of their future’

Razia Sultana, lawyer and Rohingya human rights activist, talks about camp conditions, repatriation and the future of Rohingya youth in an interview with Shuprova Tasneem of The Daily Star.

In 2017, Myanmar military operations led to the largest movement of refugees into Bangladesh. What changes have you seen in the refugee camps since then?

The single biggest issue now is freedom of movement. You need to make applications even to visit your own mother’s shelter in another block. This inability to move around inside the camp affects every facet of life, leading to our greatest problem: Lack of education.

There used to be over 3,500 learning centres that Rohingya refugees ran themselves with personal and outside donations. These teachers are now all sitting at home, with no salary and no opportunity to teach. The UNHCR are meant to set up learning centres that will follow the Burmese curriculum to make their learning more systematic, but we have been completely kept in the dark about this. The community has teachers and expertise, but they are not being involved. So who is shaping this process? And if these unemployed teachers now do private tuitions somewhere, will it be a crime, or will it just be a desperate attempt to earn a livelihood and live with a little bit of dignity?

The limits on movement has also led to an end of livelihoods. Whatever little shops that Rohingya refugees had opened have all more or less been shut down. This has led to a food crisis, especially after Covid. And then there is security, an issue that we all know about. After 5pm, there are no security forces around, and the camp is at the mercy of criminals.

There are restrictions of movement, but there is also a huge problem with crime and drug trafficking. This seems counterintuitive.

There is a huge racket passing drugs over the borders and into the camps, but only the small fry are being taken in by the police. The real drug lords who are financing the drug trade are not being pursued by law enforcement. We have to ask: given that Rohingya movement is so restricted by security forces, how are traffickers able to move drugs around?

This also applies to trafficking. If there are 10 traffickers’ boats from Rakhine state going out, then eight of them are going via Bangladesh and also picking up trafficking victims from the camps. How are they able to move around in Bangladeshi territory like this? Five percent of criminals are holding the entire camps hostage, and no one is being able to do anything about it.

Do you think this has led to stigma against Rohingya refugees?

Almost all media reports on the Rohingya are now negative, and this is having a huge impact on public perception. Recently, I saw a report on Rohingya using fake IDs. Now the people who are doing this are of course guilty of a crime, but they do not have the resources to manufacture such IDs within the camps. So yes, they are buying them, but who is making them? Why are reporters not investigating the entire network of such criminal activities?

Aid has become less than half of what it used to be. Our analysis shows that refugees are now receiving Tk 950 per month per head. Can anyone

live on this? Should they choose between food and water? If I don’t have proper food to eat twice a day, how can I be expected not to steal? If I refuse to give education to the youth, am I not pushing them towards crime? Even when we ask to give training to youth, we are not granted permission to include young men, or we have to jump through many hoops to get it. This sort of harassment is making them fall through the cracks. This situation is also making refugees extremely vulnerable to trafficking. People want to leave for a better life, to survive with dignity.

The word of the day is repatriation. What are your thoughts on this, and do you think the case against Myanmar at the ICJ will have any impact on this?

Whatever that is going on at the international courts is purely symbolic, and their requests that are falling on deaf years. Previously, the



Razia Sultana

National League for Democracy (NLD) in Myanmar had denied all allegations of genocide and dismissed them as lies. And there is no real pressure on Myanmar yet. While ASEAN did exclude Myanmar from a regional summit, this gesture means very little in the absence of strong sanctions.

Every civilian in Myanmar is under threat now, not just Rohingyas, who are not even considered to be a part of the country and denied citizenship. Yet it cannot be denied that every Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh just wants to go home. I also believe they should go back. But the question is: Will they be safe there, when even the citizens who are accepted by Myanmar are now living in fear? Minority communities are in greater danger than ever before. Yes, there must be repatriation, but it cannot lead to imprisonment, torture and death. They cannot go back to rot in shelters that are basically prisons, or worse, concentration camps.

Are there alternatives we should consider?

There is the option of third-country settlement. We have tried many times to advocate for this asylum and involve Rohingya refugees in the process, but it is very difficult. There are also Rohingya who live in countries like Malaysia, Australia and the US and want their family members in Bangladeshi camps to join them, but their applications are stuck at

immigration. We should make it easier for refugees to be resettled in this way instead of barring them from leaving.

This resettlement would be especially important for Rohingya youth, who would finally have an opportunity at education. There are a rare few Rohingya women who have had the chance to get higher education, but so far, no young Rohingya men dreaming of college in the camps have managed to get there. I know of certain international universities who have proposed taking such refugee students, but even that has not been allowed to happen.

The fact that donors’ attentions have shifted away to other crises, especially in Ukraine, have been a big blow to the Rohingyas as well. They are completely abandoned, and perhaps the most marginalised of refugees who are barely getting any crumbs from the donor table. The US has recognised what happened as genocide, but then what?

In these decision-making circles, there are people who think none of the Rohingya are educated. I even met a person who didn’t know the Rohingyas are Muslims. So these people, who carry so much stigma, how can they sit at the table with Myanmar and have fruitful talks? The people who come to these talks need to be aware of the community’s history, to work with refugees and not against them, and advise the government properly.

Some people have put Bhashan Char forward as a solution, but that is even more problematic. At the end of the day, it is Bangladeshi land, so why should they be settled there? In my opinion, it sends the wrong message to Myanmar, and puts even less pressure on them. The Rohingya refugees are not people of Bangladesh, so this cannot be a solution for them.

You have painted a very bleak picture. What gives you hope to carry on?

The Rohingya people continue to give me hope. Despite all odds, they believe they can go home one day. “If only I could go home” - I hear this so often, and it just hits you in the heart. They did not come to stay here. This cannot be their life. They live in shelters made with plastic - 10 people living in a space where three cannot live comfortably. One young boy once told me, “our cow shed back home is bigger than this.”

There is still hope, it is not just a dream, because a lot of good people are still working for them. And I hope that the Bangladesh government will also help us to move away from stigma and negative stereotypes surrounding refugees, and recognise their strength and resilience. We have many vocal voices in the camp’s civil society, but they need to be given the opportunity to speak.

We have seen in other contexts how education has helped refugees to fight crime and move away from regressive values. We don’t know when repatriation will happen, but for now, if we can focus on education, and if we stop looking at Rohingyas as burdens and try to build them up as strengths, we can see important change.

To read the full interview, please visit our website.

# The Rohingyas are running out of time

The crisis has reached a dangerous tipping point



Jan Egeland is the secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, and a former United Nations under-secretary general for humanitarian affairs. Follow him on Twitter at @NRC\_Egeland

JAN EGELAND

VISITING Myanmar in 2019, it was clear that exile was being cemented for the Rohingya community due to continued hostilities, insecurity and diplomatic impotence. Three years later, visiting the camps in Cox’s Bazar this week, the writing on the wall is even clearer: the Rohingya crisis has reached a tipping point, and refugees are fast approaching the point of no return. A new initiative, led by the United Nations, Asean and China, must enable possibilities for safe return without delay.

The one million people who fled violence five years ago did not only lose their land; they lost everything a homeland signifies: culture, identity and memory.

Children born here in “the world’s largest refugee camp” in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh have known no life outside the confines of these barbed wire fences. Refugees who pass away in exile are denied the dignity of being buried with family in their ancestral land. With every year that passes, a community that has witnessed the worst of humanity is being unmade. What the Rohingyas have endured – what they continue to endure – is a loss truly beyond belief.

The young displaced are caught in the crosshairs of uncertainty and desperation. At an age of innovation and imagination, 450,000 children, adolescents and youth are faced with insurmountable barriers to education and opportunities. Expected to contribute to their families but unable to do so, their backs have hit the wall.

According to our latest NRC report, a staggering 95 percent of refugees aged 18-24 years are

currently unemployed, and the majority are suffering from high levels of stress and anxiety. In Cox’s Bazar, the threat of a “lost generation” is increasingly a reality.

Despite the heartbreak, the humanitarian response in Cox’s Bazar is not without success. The Bangladeshi authorities, relief agencies and donors have made great strides in overturning

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the initial deforestation of hills where the refugee camps are situated. Local partnerships are increasingly enabling Bangladeshi aid organisations to have a seat at the table, and connect local communities to humanitarian efforts in the region. Still, a lot more must be done to enable the refugees to inform decisions that shape their lives.

During my visit, I conveyed appreciation to the Bangladesh

government for hosting so many refugees. In 2021, the country hosted as many refugees as Norway, Sweden, France and the United Kingdom combined. However, Bangladesh cannot do this alone.

Now is the time for coordinated, courageous action. First, countries in the region must share the responsibility for hosting refugees. In a multigenerational crisis spanning multiple borders, solidarity is in short supply.

Across the Andaman Sea, Rohingya refugees are still being pushed back by Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, and recently many have been pushed across the border to Bangladesh by the Indian government. This cruel race to the bottom must stop. State commitments to protect people forced to flee must be upheld.

Second, diplomacy with Myanmar must be supercharged to find lasting solutions. The Rohingyas have a fundamental right to return to their homeland, and regional leaders, especially the Asean member states and China, must engage to create safe conditions in Myanmar’s Rakhine. A joint UN-Asean-China summit in a neutral third country can jump-start long dormant efforts, before the next regional summit in November.

Lastly, donors who have already invested significant efforts and funding to the response must not turn away now. The crises in Ukraine, Afghanistan and elsewhere have brought unprecedented challenges, but the suffering of one community should not be elevated over the desperation of others. More donors must dig deeper, and conditions must be created for humanitarians to do more with less.

We are running out of time to give the Rohingyas in Bangladesh the future they deserve. This is the eleventh hour, and they are on the precipice of a frightening abyss.

If we ignore them – if we accept this great injustice as normal – future generations will judge us by what we did not say, and what we failed to do now.

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e-Tender Notice  
(Open Tendering Method)

Corrigendum

Memo no-995  
e-Tender is Invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following works:

Dated: 21/08/2022

Tender ID No.	Description of Works	Last Selling Date and time	Tender Security Submission date and time	Opening date and time	Tender Security
720938	Construction of 3-storied, Building with 3-storied foundation of Patgram Upazila Model Mosque in the District of Lalmonirhat under the project of Establishment of 560 Model Masjid and Islamic cultural centers in zilla and upazilla of Bangladesh ( Sub-head :- Supply & Installation of 150 KVA Electric sub-station, 30 KVA Emergency Generator, Air-cooler, Pump Motor set, Fire Extinguisher, CCTV system, Solar, L.C, PA/ Sound System ).	25-Aug-2022 16:00	28-Aug-2022 11:30	29 Aug-2022 12:30	375000/-
720941	Construction of 3-storied, Building with 3-storied foundation of Hatibandha Upazila Model Mosque in the District of Lalmonirhat under the project of Establishment of 560 Model Masjid and Islamic cultural centers in zilla and upazilla of Bangladesh ( Sub-head :- Supply & Installation of 150 KVA Electric sub-station, 30 KVA Emergency Generator, Air-cooler, Pump Motor set, Fire Extinguisher, CCTV system, Solar, L.C, PA/ Sound System )	25-Aug-2022 17:00	28-Aug-2022 11:00	29 Aug-2022 12:15	375000/-

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered Bank Branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System portal and from e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)) For more details Please contact to the PE's Support Desk (02589986051).

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