



The Plight of the Rohingya Muslims in Bangladesh

Introduction:

“Our situation here is like a prison. We are not free. I wish I was a bird, free from this condition.” – A 35-year-old Nayapara Rohingya woman.

“I cannot sleep soundly here; I am afraid they will come any moment and force me to go back. We have no money. My husband is not allowed to work. We are just like prisoners here.” - A 30-year-old refugee woman in Nayapara camp.

“The firewood usually lasts 15 days. Usually I send my child or husband to the forest to fetch wood or dry leaves, but it is dangerous; there are robbers, and the villagers or forest rangers demand money from us. They take our tools sometimes or beat us until we pay. But we don't have any money to pay.” - A 21-year-old refugee woman in Kutupalong camp.

“Government of Burma says, ‘This is not your land.’ Government of Bangladesh says, ‘This is not your land.’ So I ask you; I ask UNHCR; I ask Bangladesh; and Burma, where do I belong? Where is my home? Where can I go? I do not want to be a refugee anymore. I just want to live in peace.” - A 50-year-old resident of Kutupalong camp.

These are the some of the heartbreaking statements of the Rohingya Muslims living as refugees in Bangladesh for years in the two official camps named *Kutupalong* and *Nayapara* in the south-eastern district of Cox's Bazaar within 2 km of the Myanmar border. Among the approximate 300,000 Rohingya refugees who fled the violent persecution, endless discrimination and state-sanctioned brutal torture in Burma, only 30,000 are recognized as refugees by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and allowed to live in the authorised camps in Cox's Bazaar. The rest of the hundreds and thousands of the Rohingya Muslims who are termed as “Illegal economic migrants” by GoB live in more vulnerable, inhuman and dire conditions in unofficial make-shift camps as illegal refugees around the authorised camps or in the nearby villages. The truth is, the plight of the Rohingya Muslims is unheard by the world, silenced by the global main stream media and unnoticed or grossly ignored by the international community, as well as the Muslim world.

Influx of Rohingya Muslims in Bangladesh:

For last few decades, Bangladesh has been one of the major countries reluctantly hosting a huge number of Rohingya Muslim refugees, who are termed as the most persecuted ethnic religious minority by UN. In 1978, during Operation Nagamin (Dragon King), a violent military operation by the Burmese regime, at least 200,000 Rohingya Muslims entered Bangladesh to flee the horrifying persecution. Among them, 10,000 refugees remained in Bangladesh, 10,000 died in temporary camps and the Bangladeshi Government forcefully repatriated the rest of them. After that, Bangladesh witnessed the second influx of Rohingya Muslims during 1991 - 1992, when Burmese military Junta waged a violent campaign against this ethnic minority and forced around 250,000 Rohingya Muslims to leave their homeland where they have been living for centuries, declaring them as illegal “Bengali” migrants. The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) again tried to get rid of these desperate people through forced repatriation. But, this time with the help of UNHCR a huge number of Rohingya refugee was able to stay in Bangladesh

and around 30,000 Rohingya Muslims got official refugee status. Recently in June 2012, the outbreak of pre-planned violent communal clash between the terrorist Rakhaine Buddhists and the ethnic Rohingya Muslim minority in Northern Rakhaine State of Burma displaced tens of thousands of Rohingya Muslims from their homes, hundreds of Muslims, including women and children were brutally slaughtered in the hands of Buddhist extremists and Burmese security forces, thousands of Rohingya Muslim women's honour were violated and thousands fled to Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries to escape this brutal ethnic cleansing. GoB took harsh stances against this fresh influx by sealing the border and forceful pushback policy and refused to give them sanctuary in this land.

The life of the Rohingya Muslims as refugee in Bangladesh:

- **Appalling conditions of refugee camps:** Hundreds and thousands of the Rohingya live in disease-ridden, prison-like squalor where they are living a life of limbo caught between the crocodile and the snake. Neither are they allowed to go back to their own land nor are they recognized by the Bangladeshi government. Life is literally on hold in these camps, where there is no electricity, no drinking water, no opportunity to earn livelihood and no freedom to leave the camps. The GoB only allowed UN Refugee Agency and a few other NGOs to work with a limited number of registered refugees living in the official camps, where they provide bare minimum humanitarian assistance including food supply, basic education and life-saving health care. But the rest of the hundreds and thousands of refugees, living in the unofficial make-shift camps under sub-human and abysmal conditions receive literally no assistance from anywhere and simply left to starve. According to the description of Physicians for Human Rights, the make-shift camps are "among the worst they have ever seen." The ramshackle huts which they call home made of mud walls and covered with twigs and plastic garbage bags. During rainy season, it becomes impossible to walk inside the camp and mud shacks become too muddy to sleep in. Open swears that run through the camps, make the living condition more appalling than we can ever imagine.

- **Multiple forms of abuse and harassment:** The Rohingya refugees who do not have official recognition have to work illegally to earn livelihood and their lives are full of continuous harassment, uncertainty, intimidation, subjugation and subjection to multiple forms of abuses including frequent arrest and indefinite period of detention by local security forces. Physical and sexual abuses by local people are very common and they do not have any right to obtain justice because officially they simply do not exist. They are often arrested by local police while working outside the camp to earn their livelihood or collecting firewood from nearby forests. Immediate release is denied and often they are sent to jail for an indefinite period of time, if they fail to pay a bribe of around \$110-\$400 or manage to obtain guarantee from a Bangladeshi citizen. One Rohingya Muslim interviewed by Refugee International (RI) spent over 5 years in jail waiting for his family to pay \$300 amount for bribe. At official camps, RI was told that refugees are routinely charged by locals at the gate for leaving the camp and are often robbed when they return.

- **Sufferings of Women and Children:** Rohingya women and children live in the most vulnerable conditions among all the refugees. Refugees of *Kutupalong* and *Leda* Camps reported RI that there is absolutely no security for women and young girls. One refugee woman said, "***We never feel safe. The villagers come in whenever they want and they do whatever they want.***" As their male relatives are not allowed to work outside, young girls are often forced to sex-trade to earn money or sold by unscrupulous human traffickers as sex slaves in south-east Asian countries. Due to dwindling food supplies, women and children suffer from acute malnutrition, which is twice the emergency threshold. Sometimes people go 48 hours without food. A survey found that 65% of children under 5 years old are anaemic and chronically malnourished. Water supply is scarce and extremely inadequate. Most of the time

therefore, residents of the camps are forced to drink sea water or stagnant water from nearby rivers which causes various diseases including diarrhoea, cholera and other illnesses. Additionally, some women said that they could only take a bath, two or three times a month. Toilets are far away from the huts and extremely poor in condition and there is no segregation between men and women. Women sometimes wait until dark to go to the toilet and are then often attacked or raped by the villagers. Rohingya children are barred from attending local schools, denied healthcare and usually they have no right to look forward for a better future.

The repressive policies of Government of Bangladesh towards Rohingya Muslim:

Despite the fact that, successive governments of Bangladesh host huge numbers of severely persecuted Rohingya Muslims for decades, this stateless community was always treated as unwanted refugees or “illegal economic migrants” and a huge burden on the economy by the GoB. Every government in power, although knowing their dreadful reality in their homeland, tried to push the Rohingya Muslims back to the land of horror through forced repatriation where nothing but a gruesome fate awaits them. After few months of the violent crackdown on Rohingya Muslims by apartheid Myanmar government in June 2012, in an interview with Al-Jazeera, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina said, “***Rohingyas fleeing violence in Myanmar is not our problem... Myanmar government should take care of their citizens.***” To tackle the fresh influx and make the existing Rohingya refugees more frustrated, the government of Bangladesh has taken various repressive and discriminative policies towards them so that at one point they give up and leave this country voluntarily. These are as follows:

- Right after the violent crackdown of Burmese government in June, 2012, GoB ordered BGB (Border Guard of Bangladesh) to seal the border and pushed back all of the boats back to Burma carrying Rohingya Muslims desperately seeking shelter in Bangladesh.

- After two months, in August 2012, GoB banned operations of three international NGOs named France’s Doctors without Borders (MSF), Action Against Hunger (ACF) and Britain’s Muslim Aid who were working for hundreds and thousands of unregistered refugees in Ukhia and Teknaf of Cox’s Bazar in fear that their humanitarian assistance would increase the pull factor.

- In the official camps, government officials abruptly halted refugee resettlement and have closed all income-generating activities, including small shops and tailoring, stating that skills were provided to only help refugees upon their return to Burma.

- Bangladesh government also orders frequent crackdowns on camps, leaving thousands of Rohingya, including women with young children homeless. The recent crackdown in February of this year, on the camps at Shamlapur fishing village, 50 km from Cox’s Bazaar, without any prior notice, left 35,000 undocumented Rohingya homeless. One of the women victim said, “***We have no roof over our heads. My children are hungry and I have nothing to feed them.***”

- In July, 2014, GoB officially banned the marriage between Bangladeshi citizen and Rohingya refugee, so that no Rohingya refugee could ever apply for Bangladeshi citizenship through marriage. Not only that, GoB also instructed the marriage registers not to register the marriages between the Rohingyas.

Rohingya Muslims are our brothers and sisters and part of this *Khairu Ummah*:

Government of Bangladesh, like other rulers of the Muslim lands forgot that, the Rohingya Muslims are suffering inhuman persecution in the hands of the Buddhist terrorists only because of their religion, the same religion that they have professed. And it is their Islamic obligation

given by their Lord to help them, rescue them and provide them sanctuary during the time of need, because Allah (swt) says in the Quran:

﴿وَإِنِ اسْتَنْصَرُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ فَعَلَيْكُمُ النَّصْرُ﴾

"...if they seek your help in religion, it is your duty to help them" [Al-Anfal: 72].

These rulers also forgot that the Rohingya Muslims are not unwanted refugees, nor are they illegal migrants in the Muslim lands as these agents of the *Kuffar* state, rather they are our beloved Muslim brothers and sisters and inseparable part of this *Khairu Ummah* and we must not abandon them in the face of oppression, because Rasul (saw) said in the hadith:

«المسلم أخو المسلم لا يخذله لا ويظلمه»

“The Muslim is the brother of his fellow Muslim. He does not oppress him, nor does he abandon him...”

But these treacherous rulers' hearts are bitten by the rotten concept of “nationalism” which is holding them back to embrace their own brothers and sisters with open arms. They forgot that the bond among the Muslim *Ummah* should be the bond of Islamic brotherhood, not the bond of nationalism. They forgot that, according to many hadith of Rasulullah (saw), there is no place of nationalism, patriotism or tribalism in Islam. Rasul (saw) said:

«ليس منا من دعا إلى عصبية وليس منا من قاتل على عصبية وليس منا من مات على عصبية»

“He is not one of us who calls of ‘asabiyyah (nationalism, tribalism, patriotism etc.) or who fights for ‘asabiyyah or who dies for ‘asabiyyah.” [Sunan Abu Dawud, Hadith No: 5121]

In another hadith referring to nationalism, tribalism or patriotism, he (saw) also said,

«دعوها فإنها منتنة»

“Leave it, it is rotten...” [Muslim and Bukhari]

Additionally, in Quran Allah (swt) declares us as “*Ummatan Wahidah*” (One Ummah) and forbids us not be divided among us:

﴿وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا﴾

“And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah, and be not divided among yourselves...” [Surah Al-i Imran: 103]

But, instead of following the command of Allah (swt) and His Rasul (saw), these subservient and puppet rulers of the Muslim world, are busy obeying the command of their western colonial masters, whom they have taken as their *Ilah*, by firmly holding the flags of nationalism.

Only the Khilafah will provide sanctuary to all the oppressed Muslims of this world, including the Rohingya Muslims:

After the destruction of the Uthmani Khilafah at the hand of British agent Mustafa Kamal Pasha in 1924, Muslim Ummah lost their shield, the Khalifah, behind whom they used to take protection, behind which they used to fight, who used to rescue the weak and the oppressed; and who used to send mighty army against the oppressors. The righteous Khulafa were not only the protector of Muslims but also they proactively used to protect the rights of any human being regardless of their religion, race and ethnicity.

In 1453, Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II issued a proclamation encouraging Jews to settle in Ottoman Empire stating: **“Who among you of all my people that is with me, may his God be with him, let him ascend to Istanbul, the site of my imperial throne. Let him dwell in**

the best of the land, each beneath his vine and beneath his fig tree, with silver and with gold, with wealth and with cattle. Let him dwell in the land, trade in it, and take possession of it.” This statement was issued at a time when Jews across Europe were severely persecuted by the orthodox Christians and were in dire need of a safe haven.

The greatest influx of Jews into Ottoman Empire occurred during the reign of Sultan Mehmet’s successor, Sultan Beyazid II (1481-1512), after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, Portugal, South Italy and Sicily. The Sultan issued a formal invitation to Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal and after that, they started coming great in number. Not only that, in 1492, during Spanish Inquisition, when Jews and Muslims in Spain were presented with a cruel choice by King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella I: to become Christians, to be massacred or to leave, Ottoman Khalifah Sultan Beyazid II sent his entire naval fleet to rescue 150,000 Jews from the hand of the cruel Catholic King and welcomed Sephardic Jews in the Khilafah state with open arms. Atheist Israeli writer Uri Avnery in his article “Muhammad’s Sword” wrote: ***“Every honest Jew who knows the history of his people cannot but feel a deep sense of gratitude to Islam, which has protected the Jews for fifty generations, while the Christian world persecuted the Jews and tried many times "by the sword" to get them to abandon their faith.”***

Today, in the absence of the righteous Khalifah, there is no one to rescue our Rohingya brothers and sisters when they are expelled from their homeland, severely persecuted for their religious identity and on the verge of extinction. Today, in the absence of the Khilafah, there is no state to welcome the most weak and oppressed people of this earth when they are in dire need of shelter and protection. Rather, the governments Bangladesh, Indonesia and Malaysia are shamelessly playing human ping-pong with these poor and destitute people by pushing them to each other, while the whole world is standing still and watching silently their endless miseries. Shame on to these rulers, who claim themselves to be a Muslim! Shame on to this capitalist world, which is devoid of humanity and human rights!

Therefore, this is high time for this Ummah to get rid of this despotic and agent rulers of Muslim lands, who, instead of implementing the command of Allah and Rasul (saw), are implementing the command of the imperialists. It is high time for this Ummah to uproot this inhuman concept of “nationalism”, which kept them divided into more than fifty subservient countries and acts as a primary barrier to welcome our oppressed Muslim brothers and sisters in our lands. This is the time for the Muslim Ummah to realize, until the re-establishment of the Khilafah no Muslim regime will send his mighty army against the brutal Burmese regime, provide the Rohingya Muslims unconditional sanctuary and embrace them as our own brothers and sisters.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
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