

22 August 2019

On the eve of the second anniversary of the genocidal expulsion of the Rohingya minority from Burma, the Governments of Bangladesh and Burma have announced plans to immediately repatriate over 3500 Rohingya. These plans are premature and doomed to fail. It is clear to everyone that conditions in Rakhine State are not conducive to refugees' return.

Burmese authorities continue to destroy Rohingya villages to make room for military bases, security posts and massive IDP camps. Discriminatory policies in Burma have not changed. Lacking the restoration of their citizenship, Rohingya continue to face severe movement restrictions, as well as little access to education, healthcare, and employment, as documented by the treatment of 129,000 Rohingya IDPs. Rohingya fear without citizenship those camps will become permanent, like Thet Kel Pyin camp. Moreover, increased fighting between the Arakan and Burmese armies has further put Rohingya at risk.

Given the history of UNHCR involvement in repatriation plans, we urge UN agencies not to be complicit in any form of coercion in repatriation, physical or psychological, subtle or overt—re-traumatizing survivors of genocide.

We cannot have confidence in government claims that a "pathway to citizenship" will restore Rohingya rights. Hierarchical systems of ID cards have been designed to control the population, not integrate it as part of a pluralistic society.

We understand the political and logistical challenges faced by the Government of Bangladesh, and we note the tensions between refugees and the Bangladeshi population of Cox's Bazar. International community must stand with Bangladesh to deliver education, essential food and medicine, preventing trafficking and other crimes.

We call on UNHCR, Bangladesh and Burma to include diverse Rohingya leaders in all their decision-making- in the camps as well as diaspora. Rohingya men and women should not have been excluded from the initial repatriation MOU. There can be no repatriation without consent, and meaningful partnership with the impacted community is key. This is consistent with the commitments of the Global Compact on Refugees on self-reliance and responsibility-sharing.

Most crucially, we call on all parties to work together to ensure that the root causes of mass displacement are addressed— including Justice. Two years after the brutal Burmese military burned hundreds of villages and committed mass atrocities, there is no accountability in Burma. The only soldiers convicted of serious abuses were released after a few months, while whistle-blowers were punished. Though locked in a power-sharing government with the military, the government of Aung San Suu Kyi must be held responsible.

While China blocks robust response in the UN Security Council, the US and other international leaders have not only failed to prevent genocide but also failed to support accountability in Burma.

The Rohingya have suffered greatly, as other ethnic groups in Burma have before them. We call on the world to commit to constructive solutions, not merely Repatriation Theater driven by political considerations.

Burma Task Force/Justice for All

Jewish Alliance of Concern Over Burma (JACOB)

World Rohingya Organization