



Policy Brief on **Remembrance of Rohingya Genocide: Bangladeshi and International Perspectives**

This policy brief is based on the International Seminar on “Remembrance of Rohingya Genocide: Bangladeshi and International Perspectives” for commemorating the five years of the Rohingya Genocide and Exodus. It was organized by the Center for Peace Studies (CPS) of the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG), North South University (NSU) on 24 August 2022.



“It is time for the UN Security Council (UNSC) and regional bodies to have the issue resolved by decisive actions and Myanmar must show the political will to resolve their self-made tragedy.”

Dr. Syed Hamid Albar
Former Foreign Minister, Malaysia

“Since the Rohingya themselves desire to return to their own country, integrating them into Bangladesh is not a solution. It concerns their human rights and their ability to reside in Myanmar. We have to endure with patience. Our government has been trying to negotiate with Myanmar to repatriate them with dignity”.

Mr. M. A. Mannan MP
Honorable Planning Minister, Government of Bangladesh



“It is not only Bangladesh but the whole world that has some responsibility to resolve this Rohingya crisis. Since Myanmar has the support of China, India, and Russia, sanctions from the West won't have any effect on them. So, Bangladesh should keep on diplomatic talks with Myanmar and send back the Rohingyas.”

Professor Atiqul Islam
Vice Chancellor, NSU

“Repatriation is the key to the solution of the Rohingya crisis but the more time passes by the more repatriation has become uncertain. It has not only negatively affected the Rohingya but also the local host community in many ways. A time has come to think about taking realistic steps for both communities' well-being.”

Dr. Ishrat Zakia Sultana
Assistant Professor, PSS and Member of CPS, NSU



Context

25 August 2017 is commemorated annually as the Rohingya Genocide Remembrance Day for Rohingya all over the world. This date marks another episode of the forced exodus of Rohingya from Myanmar because of severe persecution, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and acts of genocide committed by the Union of Myanmar. There is a history of struggle for recognition, including for their human rights and dignity. After finding themselves as legally and culturally excluded strangers in their own land, they now find themselves, strangers, in a new land.

To commemorate the five years of the Rohingya Genocide and exodus, the Center for Peace Studies (CPS) of the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG), North South University organized an International Seminar titled, "Remembrance of Rohingya Genocide: Bangladeshi and International Perspectives" on 24 August 2022 at NSU. In this seminar, the Keynote Speaker was Dr. Syed Hamid Albar, Former Foreign Minister, Malaysia and current Chairman, World Islamic Economic Foundation, and Adjunct Professor, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Mr. M. A. Mannan MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Planning, People's Republic of Bangladesh, was the Chief Guest. Through CPS's presentation of a Resolution and a Position Paper on "the Rohingya in Bangladesh: five years later, our vision for the future" in this seminar, this is for the first time in Bangladesh that an academic institution has officially expressed its concern on the Rohingya issue.

Highlights from the Keynote Speech

Challenges

- The problem and challenges faced by the international community are complex - the Myanmar government simply ignored, refused to accept, or recognize any resolutions, recommendations, and advice of the UN, regional organizations, world leaders, human rights and humanitarian groups to deal fairly with the Rohingya.
- There has been widespread condemnation of the Myanmar government's actions but talk of sanctions has been more muted.
- The future of Rohingya therefore still remains uncertain and bleak. State propaganda machinery continues to aggravate Islamophobia and additionally, other ethnic nationalities in Myanmar have an ambivalent attitude towards the Rohingya, in reality, they are struggling without a friend in their own country.
- The international community emboldened Myanmar in its position that this is purely a domestic affair and thus the policy of non-interference should be observed and respected. This was adhered to by ASEAN and two major powers - China and Russia.
- Successive military regimes, subsequent civilian governments and extremist Buddhists had openly rejected the Rohingya's right to exist in Myanmar on the convenient pretext that they are just illegal Bengalis against the backdrop that Bangladesh does not accept them as Bengalis.
- The atrocities and crimes against the humanity of the Rohingya have been happening for decades, without being noticed regionally and internationally.
- With overwhelming credible records and reports of gross human rights violations, the Rohingya plight became a crisis with a response. Notwithstanding, what is happening on the ground the international community during this period was busy debating whether all these acts and crimes against humanity can be considered genocide or not.

Recommendations

- There must be a change of attitude of the government, military, and state agencies towards the Rohingya people.
- The political and democratic process in Myanmar should be all inclusive. In Arakan, the Rohingya should be able to peacefully coexist as equals.
- The Burmese government must create suitable conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable return of the Rohingya population to their homeland.
- Human rights and the Rule of Law should not be limited to just providing immediate security and relief to the Rohingyas but should also act to protect them at a bare minimum from future atrocities. Ultimately, it must include a long-term, permanent and accountable strategy that could integrate the Rohingya, taking into account their sacrifices and contributions to the country.
- ASEAN needs to play a leading role. It must formulate a mechanism to deal with the crisis by equitable distribution of the refugees among member nations, military escort of Rohingya boats, a timeline for the return of the refugees, and pressure on Myanmar.
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- The international community can also play a role by lending financial support to the countries that are/will take in refugees. The Muslim nations can play a critical role here by offering financial aid, funding, and volunteers to look after the displaced Rohingya population.
- Diplomats and UN officials should use the term Rohingya both in public and private settings. This will invalidate the Myanmar government's persistent persecution of the Rohingya and its propaganda campaign portraying them as illegal migrants.
- The international community should support the establishment of an independent international investigation into possible violations of international law against the Rohingya in Burma. While external factors could alleviate this crisis, they cannot resolve it. The seeds for the solution lie in Myanmar itself.
- There is a need for national reconciliation in Myanmar not only with the Rohingya but also with other ethnic groups engaged in conflict with the

Myanmar state. There should be immediate removal of the blockade of aid and other essential items by the government in the Rohingya internally displaced people (IDP) camps.



Highlights from the CPS Resolution and Position Paper on the Rohingya Crisis

The Government of Bangladesh graciously and compassionately accepted over 742,000 Rohingya fleeing persecution and fearing for their lives. The world was initially shocked by what was transpiring on the Bangladesh–Myanmar border. Unfortunately, even after five years, there is no sign of repatriation of the Rohingya from Bangladesh to Myanmar, which has eventually made their present situation complicated and forced them to wait for an uncertain future. While repatriation is the ultimate solution to this crisis and remains the goal of both the Government of Bangladesh and the Rohingya community, complex geopolitical issues preclude any near- or long-term resolution of their problems. The Members of the Center for Peace Studies (CPS) call on the Government of Bangladesh to—

1. receive this resolution favorably and its accompanying Position Paper commenting on the Rohingya and local host communities in Bangladesh;
2. minimize the several looming threats on the horizon by speedily implementing one or more of the activities proposed in the Position Paper; and
3. involve various concerned Government and non-government actors in the implementation of the activities proposed in the Position Paper and allocate sufficient funds for their effective implementation.

The Center for Peace Studies proposes a set of essential activities that can be implemented immediately at the local level that will likely provide short-term relief and enhanced well-being for both the Rohingya and the local host communities. While it is true that legal proceedings on behalf of the Rohingya are winding their way through international courts, it is also true that justice for the Rohingya is delayed. Justice delayed, however, is justice denied. Therefore, the CPS has identified some activities that can help ameliorate conditions for local host communities while justice for the Rohingya genocide is in process in the international court.

Along with the Rohingya's sufferings, the local host communities in Bangladesh are also suffering from multiple effects of hosting them. While the Rohingya have extremely limited or no access to livelihood opportunities, the host community often complains about "losing livelihood for their stay in Rohingya" in Bangladesh. According to research conducted by several North South University professors and other researchers, the Bangladeshi communities where the Rohingya are housed describe the following problems:

1. Fewer livelihood opportunities;
2. Loss of farmlands;
3. Environmental degradation;
4. Increased crimes;
5. Increased Risks of Hazards.

In this paper, CPS proposes feasible solutions to these identified problems. It is important that the government address these specific and identified problems or else the current antipathy and socioeconomic and cultural tensions could grow even worse between local host communities and the Rohingya, creating an even bigger problem for the Government of Bangladesh. Such modest

initiatives may contribute to the post-traumatic recovery of both the local host communities and the Rohingya while minimizing existing tensions between them both. Below are the suggested activities:

1. Supporting the Rohingya to Preserve their Cultural Heritage

Based on the experience of hosting cultural exhibitions of Rohingya artifacts in 2021, NSU can also extend support in preserving the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Rohingya in cooperation with the Rohingya Cultural Memory Center (RCMC) at Cox's Bazar.

2. Combined Community farming project

In Cox's Bazar, the Government may set land aside for a community farming project that may put Rohingya and community people together for farming.

3. Timely receiving funds from the donors

Strong follow-up from the Government of Bangladesh is needed for receiving the appealed amount each year on time. Moreover, the Government of Bangladesh also needs to follow up strictly on the minimum or no funding in the areas of education, nutrition, site management, projection, and health, etc. in 2022.

4. Preventing Disaster and Saving the Environment

With the support of the Department of Forest, trees can be planted in the deforested areas and with the support of the Department of Environment, cleanliness can be maintained in the Cox's Bazar district. Rohingya can be engaged in these activities.

5. Reducing Engagement of the Rohingya in Crimes

5.1 Social Acceptability Through Income Generation

Rohingya's access to locally available income-generating activities may increase their acceptability to the host community and contribute to refraining from engaging in criminal offenses.

5.2 Engaging the Youth and Children in Productive Work

Rohingya and local host community children and youth should be involved in extracurricular activities, community support/social welfare, and several

constructive programs on self and community well-being apart from their academic performance.

6. Education and Awareness Raising Programs

The existing informal learning system based on Myanmar National Curriculum needs to be expanded to cover all children under the Myanmar Curriculum Pilot (MCP) program.

7. Access to Health

Since Bangladesh has already sheltered the highest number of Rohingya, the healthcare system of Bangladesh should treat the Rohingya well regardless of their status in Bangladesh. In addition, a Voluntary Blood Drive can be developed by both the Rohingya and the local host community, particularly by the young generation under the guidance of the Upazila Health Office.

8. Introducing Innovative Approaches in Camp Management

Rohingya leaders by rotation on a weekly basis can be involved in the camp administration process. It may earn two-fold benefits: a) the Rohingya will be aware of the rules, procedures, and limitations, etc. of the camp authorities and thus will most likely provide cooperation for better management, b) the CICs will gain a better understanding of the problems and perspectives of the Rohingya and thus will be able to design the services.

9. Increasing Livelihood Opportunities

9.1 Local Resource Mobilization and Skill Development.

The local and international NGOs/voluntary organizations working in Cox's Bazar may be asked to recruit local people, instead of outsourcing, according to the skills and interests of the local people. Simultaneously, according to the demand in the job market, groups of Rohingya can be selected step by step to develop their skills in their areas of interest under the guidance of the Department of Social Services.

9.2 Small and Medium Entrepreneurship (SME) Together.

The donation/relief to the Rohingya can be given to help them begin small businesses/entrepreneurship together at the local level. Considering the

financial hardship of the local host community, a certain portion of the relief /donation may be provided to them to help them begin small businesses/ entrepreneurship. The Department of Social Services with the support of local NGOs can follow up on the progress of the business of both the Rohingya and the local community. Both the Rohingya and local host communities will form partnerships to start the SME in order to receive funding.

9.3 Use of technology.

In order to circulate the employment opportunities, hiring process, etc., a website may be developed. This will be helpful for both the employers and potential employees to sign up and provide employer/employee information to each other online. Such a database, from time to time, will be used to determine the next course of action for the government regarding increasing livelihood opportunities for both the host community members. The RRRC Office with the support of the ICT department of the Government will manage the website.

10. Prepare a draft of the National Legal Framework

It is necessary for Bangladesh to have a national legal framework for better management of not only the Rohingya at present but also any stateless individuals/groups in the future. The Government of Bangladesh may form a task force with the researchers, academics, policymakers, and national experts on security and human rights to prepare a draft of the National Legal Framework, which will allow the Rohingya to enjoy their right to education, health, etc. while staying within the camp.

Conclusion

For five years now, the Rohingyas have been living in dilapidated conditions in the cramped and vulnerable camps of Bangladesh. While a large portion of the international community including ICJ and regional forums such as ASEAN has been in solidarity with Bangladesh on the repatriation of the Rohingya, clearly the delay in repatriation has been complicating the conditions of the Rohingya and affecting the local host community negatively. Their repatriation to Myanmar seems bleak as their country is now under Junta rule that is fighting with its own ethnic minority groups. The Rohingyas also believe that repatriation is the only durable solution to this crisis. So, the global community needs to impose more pressure on Myanmar to speed up its repatriation process. In the meantime, the International community and donor agencies also need to strengthen the humanitarian aid for the Rohingya as they continue to live in Bangladesh until their repatriation. The Center for Peace Studies (CPS) strongly believes that the above proposed activities will be useful to minimize the negative impacts of the Rohingya crisis on the local host community and deal with the Rohingya issue from a more humane perspective.



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