

Myanmar / Bangladesh: Stop Rohingya Repatriation

(Bangkok, 21 August 2019) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development urges the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh to stop the repatriation of Rohingya refugees scheduled to start on 22 August. The Government of Myanmar has not met the conditions necessary to ensure voluntary, safe and dignified return of Rohingya refugees and the protection of their rights, including equal access to citizenship. Repatriation of refugees under current circumstances only risks further victimising the Rohingya, and allows the Government of Myanmar to skirt its obligations towards them.

More than 3,000 Rohingya refugees have been identified by the Government of Bangladesh for possible repatriation to Myanmar.¹ This is the second repatriation attempt for both countries, after an initial plan last year that was met with international outcry and protests from the Rohingya.

The conditions necessary to guarantee the protection of the Rohingya's rights in Myanmar remain absent this time. Instead of granting citizenship to the Rohingya, the Government of Myanmar promotes the National Verification Cards (NVCs), which is claimed to be the first step towards citizenship. NVCs, however, would effectively consolidate the status of Rohingyas as foreigners and further marginalise them, limiting their movement, and increasing their vulnerabilities towards discrimination and violence.

The Myanmar military has continued to commit grave human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, torture and shelling against ethnic minorities in Rakhine State.² An internet blackout in Rakhine State, along with restrictions on media and humanitarian access, raises legitimate concerns that the Government has been trying to hide ongoing violations being committed against civilians. In interviews, several Rohingya refugees have voiced a refusal to return, fearing for their safety.³

FORUM-ASIA urges both the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh to ensure that basic conditions for voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingya are present, before proceeding with any form of repatriation. These conditions include: restoration of their full citizenship; allowing their return to places of their own choosing; guarantees of freedom of movement; and unimpeded access to livelihoods, health services, education, and shelter. FORUM-ASIA reiterates its earlier call⁴ that the Government of Myanmar should address the root causes of Rohingya's displacement by repealing all discriminatory

¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/bangladesh-seeks-repatriate-3000-rohingya-myanmar-190820060941498.html>

² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/05/myanmar-military-commits-war-crimes-latest-operation-rakhine-state/>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/21/not-without-our-rights-rohingya-refugees-refuse-to-return-to-myanmar>

⁴ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=29276>

legislation and policies, in particular, the ‘protection of race and religion laws’ adopted in 2015, and provide justice for the systematic persecution and violence against Rohingyas. Almost two

years after more than 700,000 Rohingya fled into Bangladesh following a genocide by the Myanmar military, the military has yet to face any genuine form of accountability.

We also call on the international community to act urgently to ensure accountability for genocide against Rohingya, as well as crimes against humanity and war crimes against ethnic minorities, including through referral of Myanmar to the International Criminal Court (ICC), or independent tribunal, and exercise of universal jurisdiction to hold the perpetrators accountable.⁵

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 81 member organisations in 21 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.

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⁵ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=29151>

