**The abandoned Rohingya**

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The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic minority in Myanmar. Descendants of Arab traders, these people have a distinct language and different cultures from the Buddhist community. In 1982, the Myanmar government declared them stateless and denied them citizenship.

Bishop Desmond Tutu, the South African anti-apartheid activist and Nobel laureate, compared the conditions they faced, and are still facing, to that in the apartheid regime in South Africa.

In 2020, when a UN court ordered Myanmar to protect the Rohingya community from genocide, the Myanmar army – or Tatmadaw – declared that it was fighting militants in the Rakhine state, where a majority of the Rohingya live. Aung San Suu Kyi, the then leader of Myanmar (once a human rights icon and also a Nobel Laureate) denied the allegations and sided with the Tatmadaw.

In August 2017, the Burmese military brutally cracked down on Rohingya Muslims again, which sent hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing across the border into Bangladesh. According to the UN, this was a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing”. With this inhumane crackdown, more than 6,700 Rohingya Muslims were killed, 730 of them were children. It was also reported that Rohingya women and children were sexually assaulted.

Analysis of satellite imagery by Human Rights Watch revealed that around 288 villages were burned and destroyed. The Myanmar government claimed that its ‘operations’ ended by September 5, 2017, but foreign journalists had sufficient evidence to confirm that the attacks continued long after this date.

In August 2018, UN investigators published a report accusing the Tatmadaw of ‘genocidal intent’ based on mass killings and rapes. The West African country of the Gambia lodged a case against them in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), calling for emergency measures until a complete investigation was initiated. Later, the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has the authority to try crimes against humanity, initiated a full investigation.

As of July 2021, there are over one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, living in border camps. According to Reuters, Bangladesh has been moving refugees to a remote island in the Bay of Bengal – a place with high risks of storms and floods. Once they are on the island, they do not have the option of leaving without permission from the Bangladesh government. Bangladeshi authorities have also shown reluctance to work with the UN. After years of this humanitarian crisis, on October 9, 2021, Dhaka signed a deal with UN officials allowing them to help provide basic services to the Rohingya who were moved to the island. But this news has a lead lining; with the accord and concurrence of the UN, Bangladesh plans to relocate another 80,000 Rohingyas to the island.

Dhaka’s lack of basic rights for refugees is unlike the treatment of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, which has welcomed over 1.4 million Afghans. Islamabad integrated Afghan refugees into the Pakistani population, but Dhaka failed to do so with the Rohingya, crowding these people into camps and coercing them into relocation. This is not to say that Pakistan’s behaviour has been perfect, but it is better than that of Bangladesh and other European countries.

At overcrowded refugee camps, resources and essential items are scarce and are fought over in gun battles between factions of the Rohingya. Flooding and landslides have proven fatal as well. International human rights groups have sent letters to the foreign secretary of Bangladesh, requesting access to the island the refugees are relocated to, as well as an assessment of the location. The requests are usually denied. Senior Advocate of Refugees International Daniel Sullivan called the relocation plan ‘short-sighted and inhumane’.

The international community, however, has made minuscule progress; multiple NGOs and other non-profit organisations have set up methods of helping the Rohingya. The three largest organisations include the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the JAAGO Foundation, and the Hope Foundation.

The UNHCR collects donations for refugees who have already crossed the border into Bangladesh. A majority of these people are women and children, with 40 percent of the population under 12. The UNHCR airlifts thousands of metric tonnes of life-saving aid to refugee camps. Donated money goes towards providing basic necessities, safeguarding fundamental rights, and building better futures for the Rohingya.

The JAAGO Foundation aims to provide psychological support to mentally scarred children living in refugee camps. It also plans to station child protection officers and teachers within the camps and establish educational facilities to help Rohingya children adjust to their new life and to build a better future.

The Hope Foundation plans to provide Rohingya refugees with food, water, shelter, and medical supplies. Currently, it is helping overcrowded refugee camps deal with the Covid-19 pandemic by educating these refugees and providing supplies such as masks to them.

Leaders of various Muslim nations make politically correct statements about the Rohingya from time to time, but they aren’t of much help materially; neither is the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC). Even Western countries haven’t used their influence to substantially help the helpless Rohingya. However, we as private individuals can, and must, help.

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