

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Md. Shahidul Haque, Foreign Secretary of  
Bangladesh during a UNSC briefing session by Special Envoy of UN  
Secretary-General on Myanmar  
28 February 2019**

---

**Distinguished President of UN Security Council,  
Distinguished members of the Council,  
Madame Special Envoy,  
Distinguished Permanent Representative of Myanmar,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We thank you, Mr. President, for giving us an opportunity to speak today. We appreciate the efforts of nine Council members in organizing this briefing.

We thank the Special Envoy for her briefing.

We appreciate the willingness of the international community, in particular the members of the Security Council, to resolve this protracted humanitarian and human rights crisis. At the same time, we must not hesitate to express our frustration as nothing concrete has happened so far to convince us or the Rohingyas living in camps in Bangladesh about early resolution of the ‘Crisis’- that is safe, dignified, voluntary and sustainable return of the Rohingyas and their integration into the Myanmar society. Is there anything more disappointing than only discovering that despite our whole-hearted efforts the repatriation could not start due to non-conducive condition in Rakhine state of Myanmar? Is Bangladesh paying the price for being responsive and responsible in showing empathy to a persecuted minority group of a neighbouring country?

**Mr. President,**

Bangladesh does not have any agenda or ulterior motive to support terrorism anywhere in particular in Myanmar. We are successfully implementing our ‘zero tolerance’ policy towards terrorism and violent extremism. In fact, the problem of Rohingyas is an outcome of multi-dimensional and multi-layered geo-political construct having its genesis in Myanmar. It is the result of decades-long state practice of deprivation, disenfranchisement and atrocities. Hence its solution has to be found in Myanmar and by Myanmar. It is most unfortunate that Myanmar authorities are now accusing us for harbouring terrorists which is a clear attempt to shift the blame by Myanmar on Bangladesh.

In the face of such ridiculous allegations, we cannot but reiterate that our government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, is firmly committed not to allow any group of any country to use our soil or resources for terrorism. The high level of alertness and effective prevention measures by law enforcement agencies in line with our ‘zero tolerance policy’ render it absolutely impossible for any terrorist outfit to be present in Bangladesh. The Permanent Representative of Myanmar has referred to certain incidents to which we will report to the Council after necessary verification on our side.

In fact, Bangladesh has been providing enormous support to Myanmar in the last few years and conducted many combing operations against the Arakan Army. We have always been reminding Myanmar of the potential risks of fanning the fire of extremism and stoking nationalist feelings to demonize ‘Rohingyas’ in Rakhine.

**Mr. President,**

Not only Rohingyas are suffering, our own people the host community are also suffering for no fault of their own. Prolonged presence of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh has been posing formidable challenges and adversely impacting our economy, environment, social fabric and security. We are also faced with risks of human and drug trafficking, radicalization with further ramifications for the region and beyond. To inform you what the local communities are thinking, let me refer to a January 2019 report by Ground Truth Solutions, an international NGO supported by Switzerland and OECD which researches the views of people in crises, and I quote: “Their attitudes have shifted from the start of the crisis, where they felt much more supportive and welcoming of Rohingya but now are much less so, feeling that Rohingya have ‘been here too long’.”- unquote.

The idea of long-term hosting of Rohingyas by Bangladesh is not at all a viable proposition. Even if the repatriation started today, it would take another 12 years based on an estimation that 300 Rohingyas would return per day.

**Mr. President,**

In diplomacy, ‘exhaustive list’ does not exist. Yet, I must mention that we have tried everything bilaterally with Myanmar for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingyas and are continuing our bilateral engagements despite hollow promises and various obstructionist approaches by Myanmar. We have also engaged with regional partners. Yet, not a single Rohingya has volunteered to return to Rakhine due to the absence of conducive environment in Myanmar.

For our friends in the international community who advocate a bilateral approach to the repatriation of Rohingyas, we would like to reassure our goodwill and genuine intent to resolve this crisis following that path. But they must also realize their part of commitment as has been agreed by Bangladesh and Myanmar on scope and role of “interested international partners” on return and reintegration. Investing in Rakhine, without guaranteeing return of Rohingyas with basic human rights, is likely not to produce any result. Policy of appeasement is clearly not working here as it did not in the past.

Regrettably, as far as repatriation is concerned, the situation has gone from bad to worse. In a statement on 18 January, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Ms. Yanghee Lee expressed alarm over escalating violence in northern and central Rakhine state and in Chin state. According to her report, since November 2018 the Myanmar military has been engaged in heavy fighting, resulting in deaths and injuries to civilians and the displacement of people again. As a result, we had influx of even Rakhine Buddhists. The developments only serve to corroborate, what we have been saying from the very beginning of the crisis, that it is about repression against all the ethnic minorities in the Rakhine state not just Muslim Rohingyas, who have been the traditional focus of atrocity crimes. Rakhine State government prohibited humanitarian activities of international agencies in several areas which made the prospects of return by Rohingyas further uncertain.

**Mr. President,**

Here, I regret to inform the Council that Bangladesh would no longer be in a position to accommodate more people from Myanmar

**Mr. President,**

Our priority is nothing but safe, voluntary, sustainable and dignified return of the Rohingyas. This requires building confidence among them for return. Some specific measures by Myanmar demonstrating their sincerity about return may be helpful in the short term. Let me mention some:

First: Address the accountability issues. Myanmar’s own investigation process has failed to prove its impartiality and credibility, time and again. Therefore, the existing UN mechanisms namely, Ongoing Independent Mechanism (OIM), and Independent International Fact-finding Mission

(IIFFM) should be allowed to operate and cooperated with for addressing the total impunity for the decades of crimes committed in Myanmar.

Second: Ensure full implementation of the memorandum of understanding between the Myanmar government, UNDP and UNHCR, as well as of the recommendations of the Kofi Annan's Advisory Commission on the Rakhine State. We have been hearing that most of the recommendations of Annan Commission have already been implemented. Had it been so, the situation on the ground would have improved vastly. It is then very natural for one to ask why Rohingyas are not willing to return voluntarily and why we are still having fresh arrivals?

Third: Dismantle existing IDP camps, the Ghettoes inside Rakhine, where over 130,000 Muslim inmates are detained for over six years in inhuman conditions in Rakhine state, and take back the several thousand Rohingyas languishing in the 'zero line' of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

**Mr. President,**

Although we expect continued custodianship of Security Council to ensure Myanmar's compliance with the agreed provisions of bilateral arrangements for return with Bangladesh, pronouncements, thus far, from the Council has not have any impact on improving the situation on the ground. It now necessitates concrete actions by the Council before the situation goes out of control. In this context, we would like to make some specific proposals for the Council's consideration:

- First: Negotiate a draft resolution again to set out a regular reporting cycle, as an oversight mechanism, on the implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission and progress in investigations of human rights violations.
- Second: Visit to the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar and Rakhine state again by a select group of Council members, if not the full Council, to assess the developments since its visit to the region in April-May 2018.
- Third: Create civilian run 'safe zones' in conflict affected areas in Myanmar in order to ensure safety and security of all civilians irrespective of their ethnic or religious identity, as proposed by our Hon'ble Prime Minister during the 72<sup>nd</sup> UNGA. The 'safe zones' may be non-military and civilian in nature, administered by humanitarian and human rights actors including from

ASEAN countries. We would be happy to share our further thoughts and suggestions in this regard.

As for the Special Envoy, we expect her to further intensify efforts towards attaining her mandated accomplishments particularly achieving safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingyas to their areas of origin.

**Mr. President,**

We should not allow Myanmar to turn the clock backward on any ground, and therefore, we urge the Council to act in a decisive manner.

I thank you.

-----