

Rohingya Crisis: Into the 4th year
Discussion Meeting, 16 September 2020

Opening Remarks

Excellencies, Distinguished Panelists, Ladies and Gentlemen,

“25th of August marked the 3rd anniversary of the exodus of the Rohingyas from Myanmar into Bangladesh. The 700,000+ Rohingyas, who crossed over, carried with them horrifying accounts of death, torture, rape and other forms of atrocities by the Myanmar authorities. My Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina showed tremendous courage and compassion, when she decided to open Bangladesh’s borders and provide them with shelter and protection.

For Bangladesh, the 2017 exodus was not a new phenomenon. This latest exodus follows a pattern of expulsions of the Rohingyas from their homeland since the late 70s. And it never stopped completely. Before the latest influx in 2017, Bangladesh was already hosting over 300,000 Rohingyas. This only showed yet again their vulnerable situation in their own homeland due to systematic persecution and disenfranchisement.

The August 2017 tragedy was not an isolated incident; but a well thought out strategy, as has been proven in findings since then. The Rohingya crisis is rooted in the saga of total marginalization of a community from all aspects - economic, cultural, social and political. Therefore, the solution to the crisis lies in Myanmar; and with Myanmar.

Like any dislocated population, the Rohingyas want to return to their homeland. Unfortunately, there has been no progress in that respect. Myanmar has failed to create the conditions for their return; rather they have continued to deny and address the root causes of the crisis.

We have continued to remain engaged with Myanmar at the bilateral level for a durable solution to this protracted problem. Necessary bilateral instruments were signed with Myanmar to facilitate safe and voluntary return of the Rohingyas to Myanmar. We have twice initiated repatriation. However, on neither occasion, did Rohingyas volunteer to return and they have told the world loud and clear why.

This protracted situation is resulting in growing frustration among the Rohingyas in the camps; they are resorting to desperate moves, such as making perilous journeys to the seas. And there is increased risk of radicalization of the population. If the crisis continues indefinitely, with no end in sight, this may have destabilizing impact on the regional security situation.

Meanwhile, the ongoing conflicts between Myanmar military and Arakan Army is also acting as a disincentive for return, and threatening recurrence of further displacement as well. As far as the Secretary General's appeal for global ceasefire is concerned which is now an obligation under Security Council Resolution 2532, Myanmar continues to disregard it in the Rakhine State where it is required the most. Despite commitments, the dismantling of

IDP camps remains extremely slow and ineffective. Humanitarian access to the affected population remains restricted.

In fact as we speak now, the Myanmar military has mobilized huge number of troops near the border with Bangladesh. Local sources have confirmed that there is another clearance operation underway targeting Rohingya villages. This latest escalation has placed the Rohingya population in Bangladesh in a state of panic and further despair. There is a renewed fear of further displacement and influx across the border.

In the midst of all this, we see reports that Myanmar has allegedly changed the landscape of the Rakhine State, by either reassigning the Rohingya villages to new entities or simply by erasing their names from the maps. We are appalled to know that, even the UN's mapping unit has left those villages unnamed or reclassified in the maps produced by them. This is all very ominous; and needless to mention that this will only further frustrate efforts for the return of the Rohingyas.

Meanwhile, Myanmar continues to refuse unhindered access of UN humanitarian agencies into Rakhine State to or cooperate with UN's human rights and other accountability mechanism including the Independent Investigative Mechanism on Myanmar.

Some progress has been made in efforts to hold Myanmar and its military leadership accountable for their criminal actions. The investigation by the ICC prosecutor is ongoing and the proceedings in the ICJ under the Genocide

Convention are going on. And there is high expectation of the IIMM, and we look forward to hearing from our keynote speaker, Mr. Nicholas Koumjian, about the IIMM's latest report. However, most of these processes remain largely handicapped due to Myanmar's continued non-cooperation.

We are grateful to the many experts, SRSGs, the Special Envoy, human rights mechanisms and the civil society organizations for their invaluable efforts and for raising their voices against the atrocities.

Excellencies,

Myanmar's failure to respect its obligations as a State has not been met with effective response from the international community. Although sanctions have been imposed by a number of countries, that has not changed anything for Myanmar. Rather the statistics show a steady increase in foreign investments in Myanmar; and rise in export income. The response from the Security Council has remained confined only to meetings, without any tangible outcome, or perceptible impact on the ground. The international community's inaction sends a wrong message, to Myanmar. It only helps to embolden Myanmar in keeping up its 'genocidal intent'.

The Rohingya crisis is not just a humanitarian crisis; it's a political crisis first and foremost, and it requires a political solution. That solution lies in the return of the Rohingyas to Myanmar. For that to happen and be sustainable, Myanmar would need to address the root causes; create the right conditions; and be held accountable.

Three years have gone by, with no progress whatsoever. For resource constrained Bangladesh, this uncertain situation is not tenable. Our humanitarian gesture and hospitality is being over-stretched.

With our bilateral efforts for repatriation not bringing any result, at this stage, we expect decisive and concrete actions from the international community, nothing less. Otherwise, there is a real risk of this spiraling into a crisis much bigger and much more serious. We believe that the countries in the region, especially ASEAN, and Myanmar's important development and trading partners have an important role to play. They should make sincere and greater efforts to secure the conditions for Rohingyas to return to Myanmar and reintegrate into Myanmar society, with a clear pathway to citizenship. In this regard, we welcome the latest report by the IIMM to the Human Rights Council. There are some important recommendations there.

Today's discussion and expert views, we hope would serve to convince the international community to go into action, and do so urgently.

I thank you.