

Statement to be delivered by
H.E. Md. Shahriar Alam, MP, Hon'ble State Minister for Foreign Affairs
at the Virtual Conference on “Sustaining Support for the Rohingya Refugee
Response”
22 October 2020

At the outset, I would like to thank the co-hosts for inviting us to speak at this important Conference on “Sustaining Support for the Rohingya Refugee Response”. We acknowledge the continued humanitarian assistance that the international community has been providing for these displaced people from Myanmar.

We are in the fourth year of the latest Rohingya exodus. Three years back in 2017, when these persecuted people of Myanmar were fleeing, en mass, from violence, persecution, atrocities and crimes against humanity at the hands of their own people in their own country, it was Bangladesh’s Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who opened the border and saved their lives. We are the first responder to have extended all kinds of humanitarian support to these 1.1 million Rohingyas providing space, food, safety, security and health facilities even before the humanitarian community stepped in. On the part of a small country like Bangladesh with a large population and limited resources, it was indeed a huge humanitarian gesture and a daunting task that no second country was willing to shoulder.

Since then, we have been hosting nearly 1.1 million Rohingyas. During the recent drifting boats episode, it was again Bangladesh to have rescued the Rohingyas in peril and provided them shelter and care to the best of her ability.

Despite our resource constraint, we have ensured the safety and well-being of the displaced Rohingyas. Because of the timely intervention of the Government of Bangladesh and our engagement with the UN agencies and partner countries, the pandemic in the congested camps could be kept under control.

[To avert the risk of death due to landslides and to de-congest the camps, an island named Bhasan Char at the proximity of the mainland has been developed with proper infrastructure and enhanced facilities at an expenditure of US\$ 350 million from our own resources for the relocation of about 100,000 Rohingya from camps at Cox’s Bazar. In addition, for ensuring better security of the camps and the host population, the Government has started fencing around the camps. We are expecting to complete the project soon. We want to assure all stakeholders that on Security matters we are not in a position to compromise. Taking any lax measure on security issues would only be counter-productive]

Rohingyas are Myanmar nationals and as the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh mentioned in the 75th UNGA “The problem was created by Myanmar and its solution must be found in Myanmar.” Since Bangladesh is disproportionately and unjustly suffering because of this crisis, its urgent resolution is our utmost priority. For urgent resolution of the crisis, I would like to flag the following points:

Firstly, Bangladesh is not in a position to continue to take this burden any more. The **Rohingyas must return to their country of origin** as soon as possible. We must remember that they are here only on a temporary basis. The cost of hosting them on our society, security, resources, economy, environment and ecology is huge, immeasurable and in some cases irreversible. The situation is increasingly becoming untenable both for the Rohingyas and the host community.

Secondly, the Rohingyas themselves want to return to their homeland at the earliest opportunity. International community should sincerely work to create that opportunity for their return.

Thirdly, under the bilateral agreement signed between Bangladesh and Myanmar, the repatriation was to commence in January 2018 and Myanmar committed to create conducive environment for the repatriation of the Rohingyas. Despite our sincere efforts, the commencement of repatriation still remains highly uncertain due to a lack of decisive action on the part of Myanmar. Rather atrocities and violence continue in the Rakhine and Chin states together with Myanmar's attempts to falsify, misrepresent facts, make unsubstantiated claims, and lay unjustifiable blame on Bangladesh to deny its own obligations and thereby misguide the international community. The world witnessed yet another round of such effort on the part of Myanmar during the 75th General Assembly of UNGA this year.

Fourthly, lack of progress in repatriation in the last three years led to widespread frustrations and hopelessness among the Rohingyas. Growing involvements of the Rohingyas in the camps in Cox's Bazar in criminal activities and the recent episode of perilous journey in the sea for better future elsewhere are clear manifestations of the mounting despair. Further delay in repatriation may frustrate the displaced Rohingyas and entice them to fall in an easy prey to human trafficking, radicalization, and other dangerous ventures. Peace and prosperity of the region hinges critically on the success in ensuring sustainable return and reintegration of all these displaced persons in their places of origin.

Fifthly, international community has a responsibility to work with Myanmar to resolve the crisis and relieve Bangladesh from the burden that Myanmar has created.

While we appreciate the humanitarian assistance of the international community, we also call upon them to engage with Myanmar in a meaningful way to ensure the creation of a conducive environment in the Rakhine. Till to date, there is no safety and security, no freedom of movement or livelihood options in the Rakhine state. Adequate international presence and humanitarian assistance in the place of return is crucial to support repatriation and reintegration. As you are aware Bangladesh has agreed to allow education for the Rohingya children through Myanmar curriculum in Myanmar language so that they could be easily reintegrated in the Myanmar society on their return. Similar education programme in Myanmar must be taken for Rohingyas so that after return they can be smoothly reintegrated in Myanmar society.

Sixthly, during the past three UNGAs, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh has placed a number of concrete proposals. Had those been implemented, the crisis could have been resolved by this time. While the Rohingyas in the camps want to return to Myanmar, they are not confident that after return they would not be persecuted, that their basic rights would be guaranteed. **This necessitated to undertake confidence-building measures involving ASEAN and other neighboring countries as well as relevant UN Agencies (ASEAN++) whose civilian confidence-builders can undertake activities related to soft infrastructure projects, skill development, health, medical and education for Rohingyas in the Rakhine state.** Such activities would make Rohingyas confident of their safety in Myanmar and encourage them to return.

Finally, Myanmar has a long history of persecuting and driving away its own people specially Rohingyas from the country in the pretext of security operations. **This must end and be rejected.** The culture of impunity has taken a deep root in Myanmar due to the country's lack of willingness to bring the perpetrators to justice. Business as usual approach of the international community in relation to Myanmar is only emboldening Myanmar to maintain the status quo and inflict further atrocities on its minorities. For a durable solution to this Rohingya crisis, the culture of impunity in Myanmar must be stopped by vigorously pursuing accountability and justice through the international judicial mechanisms. Unfortunately, the appeasement theory that is being pursued globally vis-a-vis Myanmar through increased bilateral trade, investment and development assistance only encourages Myanmar to flout the decisions of international mechanisms and continue mass atrocities and repressive onslaughts on its very own population. This is very

frustrating that in the name of appeasement to Myanmar, unreasonable pressures are being mounted on Bangladesh threatening its sovereignty and security. The role of the United Nations in saving “humanity from hell” is also not visible in its policy actions towards Myanmar.

Unhindered humanitarian assistance is undoubtedly important for the sustenance of the displaced people. However, helping the Rohingyas return to their home in Myanmar would be the real and most valuable service to this persecuted community. We look forward to firm commitments and concrete proposals for a durable solution from this event.

I thank you all.